THE NEW REPUBLIC

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A MORMON IN THE WHITE HOUSE?

WHY RELIGION MATTERS
DAMON LINKER

+

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Cover Story

Damon Linker **18** **The Big Test** Mitt Romney says he takes his Mormonism seriously. Maybe the rest of us should, too.

Politics & the World

4 **CORRESPONDENCE**
The Iraq nightmare, ragtag gangs, walking off the cliff, &c.

Peter Beinart **6** **TRB | New Class** Irving Kristol's bastard children.

The Editors **7** **The Jungle** Our theatrical immigration policy.

Conor Clarke **8** **Shooting Blanks** The NRA's futile quest for a bogeyman.

Michael E. O'Hanlon **9** **War Corps** How Americans can stop genocide.

Tom Bissell **11** **Rolling Estonia**
Fast times on the Baltic Riviera.

Jonathan Cohn **13** **Great Danes** We have seen the shiny future of U.S. liberalism. It's called Denmark.

Martin Peretz **38** **CAMBRIDGE DIARIST | Village People**

Books & the Arts

Stanley Kauffmann **22** **FILMS | A Trouble, a Trifle** *Blood Diamond* is disconnected from its history; *The Holiday* offers a comparative study in acting.

Isaiah Berlin and David Ben-Gurion **23** **Religion, Identity, and the State** In 1958, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion wrote to Isaiah Berlin to ask his advice on a problem involving questions fundamental to religion and identity in the Jewish state. Here, from the archives, is their exchange.

Emily Wilson **28** **Passions and a Man** *The Aeneid* translated by Robert Fagles, with an introduction by Bernard Knox

Eric Arnesen **34** **In-Between People** *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom From the 1790s Through the Civil War* by Melvin Patrick Ely

Ernest Hilbert **37** **POEM** | *Calavera for a Friend*

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY *Eddie Guy*

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CORRESPONDENCE

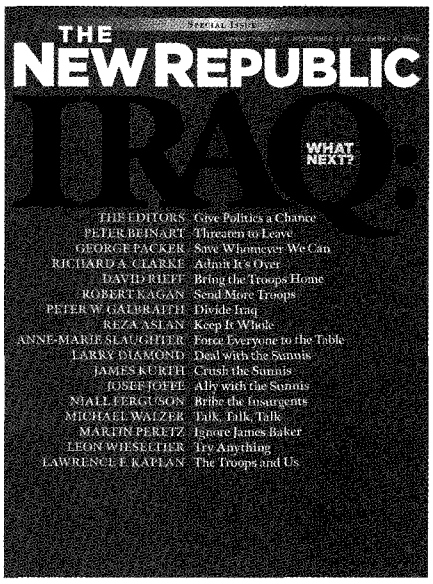
CONTRITE FIGHT

I AM GRATEFUL TO *THE NEW REPUBLIC* for underscoring the many possible approaches to concluding our current national nightmare in Iraq (November 27 & December 4). Of all the fine contributors to this issue, however, none explicitly mentioned one crucial step that we need to take: complete and candid acknowledgment of our wrongheadedness and wrongdoing since March 2003. It is one thing to imagine the future using different scenarios. It is another matter to rise to the occasion and admit unequivocally that we were wrong from the start. I believe that this is the definition of true courage. In my religious tradition, we believe that one cannot improve oneself and move away from adversity without recognizing and conceding error, expressing remorse, and pledging to make future improvements. Unless our country confesses its hubris and owns up to its misuse of intelligence data and blunders on the battlefield, none of your possible solutions will satisfy those in the world community who have witnessed the enormity of our folly. To perform this kind of act requires true chutzpah.

RABBI JONATHAN BIATCH
Madison, Wisconsin

NO SUNNI LEFT BEHIND

PETER BEINART QUOTES JOHN DEWEY on the contradictions of choosing war as the route to peace ("To the Brink," November 27 & December 4). But Dewey was devastatingly wrong in 1919 and remains just as wrong today. In October 1918, the Allies—fatigued and unsure of the extent of their military domination—allowed Germany to negotiate an armistice, leaving the army intact, free to march home under its colors and be greeted by its new president with the words: "You are undefeated." We could have chased the Imperial army back across the Rhine; we could have destroyed its ability to fight, reduced it to ragtag gangs, and demanded (and gotten) unconditional surrender. But we didn't. We lost our nerve and ended up buying the peace of 1918 with an ocean of the next generation's blood. The parallels with Iraq are chilling. Our enemy there is the unrepentant Sunni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IRAQ:
WHAT NEXT?
THE EDITORS Give Politics a Chance
PETER BEINART Threaten to Leave
GEORGE PACKER Save Whomever We Can
RICHARD A. CLARKE Admit It's Over
DAVID RIEFF Bring the Troops Home
ROBERT KAGAN Send More Troops
PETER W. GALBRAITH Divide Iraq
REZA ASLAN Keep It Whole
ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER Force Everyone to the Table
LARRY DIAMOND Deal with the Sunnis
JAMES KURTH Crush the Sunnis
JOSEF JOFFE Ally with the Sunnis
NIALL FERGUSON Bribe the Insurgents
MICHAEL WALZER Talk, Talk, Talk
MARTIN PERETZ Ignore James Baker
LEON WIESELTIER Try Anything
LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN The Troops and Us

Baathists. We have to engage and destroy them, reducing to nothing Iraq's homegrown version of Germany's 1919 *Freikorps*; we have to leave no shred of an organization that can build, from a half-done job, a new generation of leaders equipped with a stirring litany of myths. The Shia militias, which now seem to engage so much of our attention, are none of our concern, especially when many of those whom they kill are our enemies. If we have to choose among the Iraqi Shia, we should apply Winston Churchill's response when asked to choose among the various rebel leaders in Yugoslavia: "[F]ind out who's killing the most Germans." If we don't go on a harsh and bloody offensive against the Sunni Baathists, late though it may be in this most incompetently prosecuted of modern U.S. wars; if we don't hunt them down wherever we find them, all the way to Damascus if necessary; if we don't engrave the story of our military dominion into the consciousness of every Sunni Baathist, we will leave behind the myths and the mythmakers that will drive us into even bloodier wars tomorrow.

MAX DAVIES
Orlando, Florida

PETER BEINART RESPONDS:
I am dubious that the United States and its allies could have thoroughly crushed Germany in World War I. (Certainly, it would have been far easier simply to impose a more just, less punitive peace.) And I am even more dubious about Max Davies's proposals for Iraq. The Iraq conflict, unlike World War I, is a counterinsurgency war, in which the hearts and minds of the people among whom the insurgents live are absolutely critical. Surely, a brutal campaign in Sunni Iraq would simply produce more hatred of the United States (and of our Shia partners in government)—not merely among Baathists, but among virtually all Iraqi Sunnis and Sunnis across the Middle East. That would make the political settlement that offers the only hope of ending Iraq's civil war and America's occupation much harder.

BLOCKHEADED

IF DEMOCRATS IN CONGRESS FOLLOW Peter Beinart's recommendation, then I will vote Republican in 2008 ("Block Party," November 20). In my opinion, this column was an attempt to persuade people that walking off a cliff is a viable way to gain momentum. I believe Democrats won the Congress because they promised to govern for the benefit of all Americans and not merely to stop President Bush from governing. I hope the Democratic Congress will come up with new ideas and not just ways of marking time until 2008.

HOWARD SONODA
Amherst, Massachusetts

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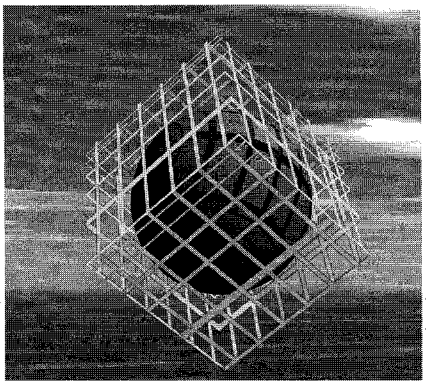

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New Class

TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

VIRTUALLY NO ONE STILL BELIEVES that the United States can quickly impose democracy in foreign lands. Almost everyone wants a pragmatic foreign policy, not a crusading one. Fewer and fewer Americans think our government can fix Arab culture. In other words, neoconservatism is back.

First-generation neoconservatism, that is. In a historical irony, many of the people who most thunderously denounce neoconservatism actually sound a lot like the original neocons themselves.

Liberal bloggers sometimes call themselves members of the "reality-based community." And that would have been a fitting motto for the first neocon journal, *The Public Interest*, founded in 1965 by Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell. If *The Public Interest* had a bête noire, it was faith-based politics. The great danger to good government, argued its founding editorial, is "a prior commitment to ideology. ... For it is the nature of ideology to preconceive reality."

The ideology that worried *The Public Interest*'s editors most was excessive faith in government's capacity to solve entrenched social problems. Great Society liberals, they worried, were too confident in their ability to restructure the lives of the poor and too dismissive of the harm they might do in the process. Traditional conservatives, of course, said the same thing. But traditional conservatives were as immodest about the redemptive power of capitalism as liberals were about the redemptive power of government. What distinguished the early neocons was their skepticism about both. They did not seek to abolish the welfare state; that would have been absurdly hubristic. As Norman Podhoretz, who turned *Commentary* into the second major neocon journal, has written, neocons simply wanted to place "certain limits" on government action, limits defined not by "issues of principle" but by "practical considerations, such as the precise point at which the incentive to work was undermined by the availability of welfare benefits."

The Public Interest dealt primarily with domestic policy. But, in foreign affairs, neocons displayed the same skepticism toward what Francis Fukuyama has called "utopian social engineering." Early neocon foreign policy was aggressive; Podhoretz and Kristol wanted to confront communist movements across the globe. But, for the neocons, preventing communist takeovers did not mean imposing liberal democracies. In Daniel Patrick Moynihan's famous maxim, conservatism's key insight was that culture matters more than politics. And, if a nation's culture was not conducive to democracy, attempts to impose one would backfire. In her famed 1979 *Commentary* essay, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," Jeane Kirkpatrick ridiculed the liberal demand that Nicaragua and Iran shed their authoritarianism as a precondition of U.S. support. "No idea holds greater sway in the mind of educated Americans," she wrote, "than the belief that it is possible to democratize governments, anytime, anywhere, under any circumstances. This notion is belied by an enormous body of evidence." If neocons thought it utopian to believe Washington could rapidly end poverty, they thought it equally utopian to believe Washington could rapidly instill democracy. In both cases, they believed, such hubris was a particularly liberal vice.

As it turns out, that was wrong. In the wake of America's success in the cold war and the right's success in U.S. politics, the same hubris began to afflict many neocons themselves. By 1996, Podhoretz acknowledged that neocons no longer wanted to "reform rather than abolish the welfare state." They wanted to repeal it altogether as part of a "conservative revolution"—a phrase that would have made the early neocons shudder. On foreign policy, the hubris took longer to gestate. After a flirtation with democracy-promotion in the later Reagan years, older neocons returned in the 1990s to Kirkpatrick-esque skepticism, attacking the Clinton administration's nation-building efforts in Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans. "The prospect of American military intervention and occupation to 'make democracy work' ... in short ... something like an American empire with a purely ideological motive power ... is not and cannot be a serious option for American foreign policy," argued Irving Kristol in 1991.

But, while the original neocons were again attacking utopian foreign policy, some younger comrades—with less experience of pre-Reagan neoconservatism—were embracing it. And it was this new breed—embodied by Kristol's son, William, and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz—who, after September 11, helped push the Bush administration toward unilateral, coercive democratization. And thus, neoconservatism, which initially prided itself on its modesty and empiricism, surrendered those qualities entirely.

Which is why, in an Alice in Wonderland twist, neocon-hating liberals have become neoconservatism's true heirs. It is young "reality-based" liberals, having watched the Bush administration's theological denial of global warming and its theological approach to the Iraq war, who today champion empiricism over ideology. In foreign policy, they prefer liberal democracy to dictatorship but doubt America's capacity to remake societies we don't understand. In domestic policy, they want a larger government role but don't share the easy optimism of Great Society liberals, who witnessed the extraordinary government-led progress of the postwar decades. Those earlier liberals shared the faith of their time, in the transformative capacity of government. Today's liberals have come of age doubting the faith of theirs, in the transformative capacity of capitalism. From deregulation to free trade, they are more skeptical of the unfettered market than the Clintonites of the '90s. But their skepticism stems less from ideological antipathy than from empirical observation—a suspicion that the free-marketers prefer the visions in their head to the facts on the ground. Like the founders of *The Public Interest*, they have spent more time tearing down icons than building them up.

One day, if they are lucky, that will change. Today's liberals will find success and erect icons of their own. Then they will be true neocons no more.

PETER BEINART

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The Jungle

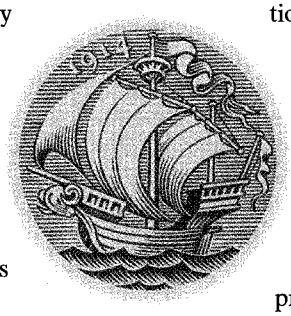
OVER THE LAST few years, anti-immigration sentiment in this country has stiffened—not unlike Lou Dobbs's hair. Even the president's conservative supporters moan that the author of the Bush Doctrine has been a ninny when it comes to guarding the Southern border. This growing discontent helps account for the events of the morning of December 12, when the White House launched another campaign of shock and awe. More than 1,000 Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, clad in riot gear, swooped down on six Swift & Co. meatpacking plants. With the news cameras rolling, the agents carted away nearly 1,300 Latino immigrants whom they accused of "identity theft." The most telling crackdown came in Greeley, Colorado, where 261 workers were hauled away, but only ten were arrested for identity theft.

This was a theatrical stunt, not the makings of an immigration policy. But, if Bush did want a new-and-improved immigration policy, meatpacking would be a good place to start. There is, after all, a reason that immigrants populate the Swift plants: An industry that once prided itself on its stable, middle-class workforce has become a hellhole that only the most desperate workers would enter.

In the postwar years, the industry matured beyond the bloody, septic pit that Upton Sinclair once exposed in *The Jungle*. It became heavily unionized and began paying wages equivalent to $20 an hour today, accompanied by generous benefits. But, beginning in the late '60s, the companies, eager to escape unions, relocated from cities to the rural Midwest and Southwest.

And, with their move, they changed how meat was processed. They replaced skilled and semi-skilled workers with assembly lines that turned out packaged beef and pork products. Workers now stood on slippery floors in dark, fetid buildings wielding knives and power tools with which they would slice steers or hogs as they swung past at high velocity. They were paid about half of what their unionized counterparts had earned. The Jungle had reemerged.

The new assembly-line jobs were extremely dangerous. Lacerations were common, as were maimed limbs. Repetitive muscular injuries were virtually unavoidable. (Imagine throwing a baseball with the same motion 10,000 times a day.) Nearly one-third of workers at the average plant suffer a work-related injury each year. That has contributed to an astoundingly high turnover rate.



During the 1980s, immigrants emerged as the rank and file of the new nonunionized industry—especially Latinos, but also refugees from the Balkans, Southeast Asia, and East Africa. This was often by design. The companies actively recruited on the border. "They don't care if the workers are legal or illegal," one recruiter for meatpacking and construction firms told the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Some towns in Iowa even have unofficial "sister cities" in Mexico that furnish a ready supply of workers.

In other words, more raids aren't going to stanch the flow of immigrants. Immigrants flock to these plants because the labor market demands their presence. There's simply no homegrown workforce for this kind of supremely unattractive job. What's more, these plants exacerbate social tensions: Immigrants aren't just blamed for swiping U.S. jobs; they are unfairly blamed for low wages and abysmal working conditions.

So, if the Bush administration truly wanted to alleviate the tension that surrounds immigration, it would reform the industries that rely on immigration. It could begin by enforcing the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, which makes the federal government responsible for assuring "safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women." Of course, Bush has done exactly the opposite. One of his first presidential actions was to overturn the ergonomic standards that the Clinton administration had adopted. These would have applied directly to the meatpacking plants. To add insult to injury, the Bush administration even stopped requiring employers to report these injuries, enabling it to claim the industry has become safer.

The National Labor Relations Board can also enforce existing laws that guarantee workers the chance to organize. The United Food and Commercial Workers, for instance, has enjoyed success organizing immigrant workers, but it faces hostility. One meat processor hired its own security force, whose chief was convicted of beating up organizers. If the administration were to enforce these safety and labor laws, it could ease the plight of illegal immigrants. And it could also help create acceptable jobs for unemployed American workers. That wouldn't capture headlines like troopers raiding plants, but it might help calm dark passions. ■

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The NRA's hunt for enemies.

Shooting Blanks

BY CONOR CLARKE

IT'S EARLY DECEMBER and Chris Cox, the NRA's chief lobbyist, is describing the exotic hunting trophies—from assorted skulls to giant warthog hooves that serve as bookends—that decorate his Capitol Hill office. "The Kudu. The Livingston Eland. The Blue Wildebeest," says Cox in his mellifluous Jackson, Tennessee, accent, ticking off the creatures he has downed. He pauses, then beams, "And the Cape Buffalo. It's one of the Big Five—one of the five most dangerous animals you can hunt in Africa."

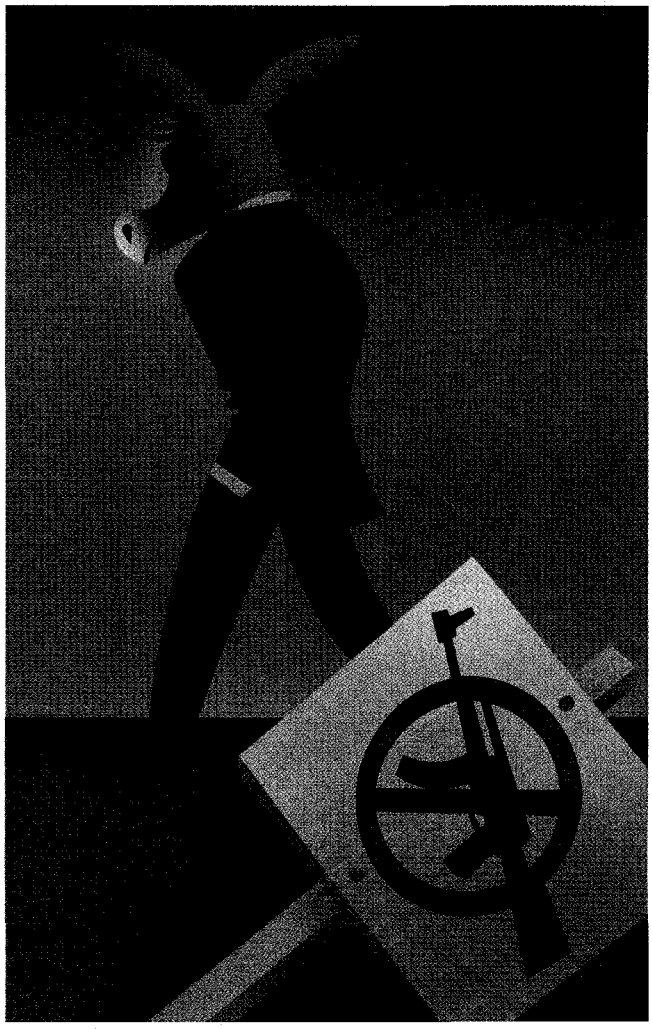
But there's one recent kill that Cox isn't bragging about. In the 2006 election, the NRA backed a historic 58 Democrats with gun-friendly views for federal office—and every single one of them prevailed. This electoral coup has effectively stymied any last hopes for gun-control legislation—already eclipsed these last few years by the graver arms-and-the-man issue that is Iraq. Cox and his organization, however, are not celebrating. In fact, the NRA sounds downright panicked by what its direct-mail appeals called the "biggest election disaster in nearly 15 years." On November 9, an organization press release waxed apocalyptic about the "extreme opponents" of the Second Amendment who were about to take top committee seats. And, speaking just before the election, NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre described the prospect of a Pelosi House as "a real-life nightmare."

This horror-flick rhetoric may have something to do with the fact that the kind of legislation the NRA loves, such as expanding concealed-weapons laws, doesn't really have much chance of passing, either: Democrats are still Democrats, and the famously liberal John Conyers will soon take the helm of the House Judiciary Committee—through which almost all gun legislation must pass. But what it really reveals is that the NRA has woken up to the nightmare of its own irrelevance: Now that it has successfully bagged those pesky Brady Bill–loving Democrats and loosed the more gun-loving moderate breed upon the land, it's out a bogeyman—and, potentially, millions of dollars in donations. Compounding this crisis is a dizzying reversal of culture-war stereotypes: The new president of the Brady Campaign, the country's largest gun-control advocacy group, is a former Republican mayor from Indiana. The new president of the NRA is a petite Jewish woman from outside of San Francisco. Frightening the bejesus out of gun owners has never been harder.

IT WASN'T ALWAYS this way. In late 1993, President Clinton signed the Brady Handgun Control Act—which mandated up to a five-day waiting period for all handgun purchases—and, a year later, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which included the famous Assault Weapons Ban. These were the biggest pieces of gun-related legislation in a quarter-century, and they were red meat for the NRA's base. In the days before the 1994 election, the organization sent out twelve million direct-mail items and poured more than $3 million into picking off 24 "high priority" Democrats. Nineteen of them lost and, thanks in part to the NRA, Democratic control of Congress came to an end.

But, with anti-gun menace Clinton still in office, the NRA had the perfect villain to rile up the troops. In 1995, the organization sent out a notorious fund-raising letter that called federal law enforcement officials "jack-booted thugs" and declared, "[I]n the Clinton administration, if you have a badge, you have the government's go-ahead to harass, intimidate, even murder law-abiding citizens." After the letter's taste was questioned, LaPierre bragged that the organization would use it to raise "well over a million dollars." The money was all for one purpose: In the run-up to the 1996 presidential election, he promised to "clean President Clinton's clock."

The president's timepiece remained intact, but when Al Gore replaced him as the liberal threat in the 2000 cam-



DAVID COWLES

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paign, Gore made the mistake of supporting mandatory child-safety locks and stricter background checks at gun shows. It was all the NRA needed. Days before November 7, NRA President Charlton Heston—illustrating the organization's gift for understatement—described the election as "the most important since the Civil War." The NRA spent an all-time high of $20 million. Gore lost.

But, with George W. Bush and man-hunter Dick Cheney in office, not to mention a Republican Congress, the new decade offered the NRA considerably fewer opportunities to claim victimhood. It won easy victories on the Hill—including the expiration of the Assault Weapons Ban; a law insulating gun manufacturers from firearm injury–related lawsuits; and a post–Hurricane Katrina bill that prevents government officials from seizing lawfully owned firearms in the wake of an emergency. Simultaneously, more Democrats began to drop gun control as a serious legislative issue. "If we learned anything from the 1990s," says incoming House Commerce Committee Chair (and former NRA board member) John Dingell, "it is that gun control is a political loser for Democrats."

As legislating became easier for the NRA, however, fund-raising became harder. When the organization set its sights on Gore, its PAC raised just shy of $18 million. But contributions for the protection of gun rights have fallen since then, and, when the NRA took on John Kerry four years later, its PAC had less than $13 million in its coffers. This combination of changes has left it in a difficult position. On the one hand, Cox can't stop taking credit for the Democrats' ideological shift: He marvels at how "the NRA changed the political landscape 180 degrees" and reminisces fondly about the "overwhelming asswhipping" he delivered on the post-Katrina bill. On the other hand, he seems to insist that, in fact, there has been no great ideological shift at all: Gun owners should be worried sick about the rise of folks like Nancy Pelosi, John Conyers, and Louise Slaughter—the three House Democrats about whom the NRA press releases seem most histrionic. "Any gun owner who thinks this is a safe time is mistaken," says Cox, his brow appropriately furrowed with concern.

BUT NO ONE really expects gun control advocates to be much of a national threat—including, it turns out, the gun control advocates themselves. "Not a whole lot is going to move through Congress," admits Paul Helmke, president of the Brady Campaign. Nor does the Democratic leadership really seem to care. "They just aren't talking about gun control," says one top Democratic leadership aide. "It's really on the back burner."

In its heart of hearts, the NRA seems to know this, which is why the organization has been busy taking its agenda to the state and local level. Since 2000, it has increased the number of state and local lobbyists by one-third. Their efforts have paid off: The NRA has successfully pushed for the right of gun owners to stand their ground and use deadly force in the case of an attack in 14 states this year. But these fights have neither the intensity nor the glamour of the '90s—when, among other things, LaPierre challenged President Clinton to a high-noon shootout over the Assault Weapons Ban.

Indeed, in its quest for a new dueling partner, the NRA has been forced to expand its search beyond U.S. borders. Over the summer, LaPierre spearheaded a campaign that claimed the United Nations was planning a July 4 conference to finalize a treaty that "would strip all citizens of all nations of their right to self-protection." The U.N. talks had little to do with gun ownership—they concerned just trafficking and trade—and no conference was actually planned for July 4. But, nevertheless, the campaign was a success: The U.N. was inundated with more than 100,000 letters from American gun owners. In May, LaPierre—who is selling a new book, *The Global War on Guns: Inside the U.N. Plan to Destroy the Bill of Rights*—bragged that his global gun-rights campaign was going to double NRA membership to eight million.

That seems premature, especially when Cox's "top legislative priority" on the federal level is ending Washington, D.C.'s handgun ban. It's unlikely that many NRA members will rally—or open their checkbooks—for this cause, which will affect at most a few thousand people. And why would they, when the NRA is taking on the world? ■

The ideal army.

War Corps

BY MICHAEL E. O'HANLON

"EVEN IF YOU sent a million soldiers to Darfur, that would not solve the problem," a Sudanese minister recently taunted Western governments. The West could probably prove him wrong with a mere 20,000 troops, but, unfortunately, that seems unlikely to happen anytime soon. It has now been four months since the United Nations authorized the deployment of peacekeepers to Darfur to stop the killing and destruction that has so far claimed 400,000 lives. During that time, the genocide has, by most accounts, accelerated. But the United Nations will not send peacekeepers to the region without Sudan's approval, and Sudan's genocidal leaders—eager to see the carnage continue—refuse to give their approval, so the U.N. force hasn't deployed. And it probably never will.

The lesson of Darfur is clear: As we should recall from

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Internally displaced Sudanese women wait in line for food in the northern Darfur region of Sudan, September 24, 2004.

the Balkans, working through the United Nations is a deeply problematic way to stop an ongoing genocide. The United Nations moves slowly, and a slow response to systematic killing grants the perpetrators precious time to murder ever larger numbers of people. Moreover, even when the United Nations, or another group like NATO, resolves to send forces, there remains that nagging little question of who will provide them—especially when time is short and the need for rapidly deployable troops is acute.

And so, if the United States and its allies want to prevent future genocides, we're going to need a better response mechanism—one that allows us to deploy troops quickly in the face of mass slaughter. In short, we need to create a U.S. military division dedicated solely to the prevention of genocide. This new capability may not come soon enough for Darfur, alas. We should try to act quickly, perhaps in time to address the genocide in Sudan, but, in any case, before the next spasm of mass killing erupts in some forgotten corner of the world.

CLEARLY, U.S. FORCES will not remain in Iraq and Afghanistan in large numbers forever. Nevertheless, the overstretch facing today's military is worth taking into account as we construct a plan for responding to future outbreaks of genocidal violence. We should never be in a position where we are hesitant to stop a genocide because our troops are otherwise occupied, but that is precisely the situation we face today. To saddle our ground forces right now with an additional mission would verge on unconscionable. As one retired four-star general put it to me privately, never has the nation asked so much of so few for so long. Many troops have barely seen their families since 2003. Already, the Pentagon has begun to face recruiting problems, and the modest troop increases President Bush is now preparing to authorize will likely be hard to achieve. Forcing the military to accept another mission—especially one not directly linked to our traditional national security interests—could make it even harder to keep enlisting troops.

A genocide-prevention division within the U.S. Army would circumvent this problem. Since its only mission would be to stop genocides, deploying the force would never require us to ask more of soldiers who already have their hands full with other conflicts. Moreover, those volunteering for the new force would know exactly what they were getting into and enlist specifically because they embraced the mission. These soldiers could be recruited from the ranks of idealistic college and high school students across the nation who have done so much to keep Darfur in the public eye.

It's difficult to say exactly how many soldiers would be needed for such a force—some genocides are more militarily complex than others—but 20,000 seems like a reasonable goal. That, after all, is the approximate number of troops that would be required to end the Darfur genocide. The figure may seem relatively small, but keep in mind that the perpetrators of genocide—like the *Janjaweed* in Sudan—are often not particularly sophisticated by Western military standards. In a situation like Darfur, soldiers would largely monitor villages and refugee camps. Their jobs would be somewhat dangerous and would require discipline and basic infantry skills—but they would not be extremely complicated. These soldiers would have to be well-trained and led by officers who had been part of the mainstream U.S. military. But they would not need to meet every standard we demand of main combat forces.

TO BE SURE, in cases like Darfur, where the division is deploying in hostile territory, these soldiers could require backup from regular Army or Marine units. Depending on the particular circumstances, Air Force jets or Navy helicopters might be needed for some operations as well. In other words, we would be adding—though only modestly—to the burden faced by existing troops.

We would have to be especially careful about decisions to intervene in cases where the likelihood of escalation or extreme danger was high. As a result, such a force might not be able to stop every genocide. And, perhaps, some genocides would require more than 20,000 troops, or greater levels of assistance from other American military personnel, or troop contributions from our allies. Indeed, the most logical way to address Darfur would parallel Kosovo and involve pledges from our NATO allies to deploy with us. In that event, 5,000 to 10,000 U.S. troops could suffice. But, whatever the specifics, it would be well worth our time to start working through them and laying the groundwork for a new kind of military force. Darfur, after all, has taught us that we need to confront genocides with more than diplomacy. Sudan's government, emboldened by our inaction, now brags that its macabre plans couldn't be blocked by a million soldiers. One thing is for sure: It certainly would take more than zero. ■

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Fun on the Baltic Riviera.

Rolling Estonia

BY TOM BISSELL

THE PATHS AVAILABLE to nations coping with the grim and often sanguinary legacies of communism are few. There is the Russian way: Retain, defend, and celebrate the most singularly awful aspects of communist rule. There is the Uzbek way: Swap the name of the Uzbek communist party for the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan; carry on forthwith. There is the Vietnamese way: Preserve communism's ceremonial, revered-elders overlay; disown most of the economic advice. And there is the Chinese way: Change everything, admit nothing. In light of all this, it is sadly difficult to imagine a post-communist nation achieving governmental transparency, an uncorrupted economy, and lives for its citizens untouched by the tentacles of a busy secret police force.

But consider Estonia. I had been hearing of the amazements of this nation and, in particular, of its capital, Tallinn, for some time: an Old City whose preserved medieval architecture functions as a Gothic time machine; a friendly populace with an enterprising work ethic (the Internet phone service Skype was an Estonian company, bought last year by eBay for more than $2 billion); a good-naturedly hedonistic nightlife; and a number of excellent restaurants. I once had the rare honor of being mugged three times in one day in one former Soviet capital—the last coming at the sticky-fingered hands of the police themselves—so, when looking over a *Lonely Planet* guidebook, the first place to which I usually turn is the "Dangers & Annoyances" section. While warnings abound for its Baltic neighbor Latvia ("It definitely pays to be streetwise here"), Estonia rates no admonitions at all.

The twentieth century was not kind to Estonia, providing it with both Nazi and Soviet occupations. Yet, while its history as an independent nation-state has been sporadic and brief (it spent several centuries under Russian and, before that, Swedish rule), Estonians themselves form one of the oldest extant cultures in Europe. A people closely related to the Finns, Estonians have existed in what is today called Estonia since the time of Cheops. Estonia was recently rated the sixteenth-least corrupt country in Europe, far ahead of any other former Soviet state and better than founding EU member Italy. Its bow-tied and owlishly appealing president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves—a Swedish-born ethnic Estonian who grew up in the United States—has been known to speak of Estonia forming "a Huntingtonian subcivilization different from both its southern and eastern neighbors."

In September, I traveled to Estonia—and found what appeared to be paradise. In Tallinn's airport, passing through customs took seven-and-a-half minutes. Compared with any other European capital, or even any midsized U.S. city, traffic was laughably light. Mercedes-Benz 350s and Lexus SUVs prowled the cobbled streets of Tallinn's truly lovely Old City. Technologically, Estonia seemed like a planet from a Flash Gordon serial: Clicking on my AirPort icon just about anywhere I went in Tallinn resulted in a Homeric catalog of free wireless providers, and I learned that newspapers can be purchased from vending machines with a cell phone and that voting can be done online via a national-identity card. Tallinn's striking Museum of Occupations, which details Estonia's dreary experiences under Nazi and Soviet rule, was rigorously detailed and scholarly while, at the same time, admirably restrained. (It also treated frankly the matter of many Estonians' collaboration with the Nazis.)

As for Tallinn's nightlife, it seemed genuinely fun and welcoming—if, that is, one could overlook the drunken Scottish men giving one another comradely punches in the face on their way to the next strip club. One night at a disco, a woman, for whom the phrase "out of my league" had been invented, waved me onto the dance floor to join her for an encore of "Welcome to Estonia," a popular local anthem sung to the tune of James Brown's "Living in America." Tallinn boasted what I can say were—without fear of hyperbole—the most jaw-droppingly beautiful women I have ever seen in my life. (One Estonia-boosting tract cheerfully explains: "The concentration of beautiful and interesting women in Estonia is apparently among the highest in the world.") Perhaps relatedly, the one time I was approached by a young Estonian looking to unload some drugs, the narcotic in question turned out to be Viagra.

My last night in Tallinn, a cash machine captured my bank card. While I pounded on the screen, an Estonian man approached, whipped out his cell phone, called the bank's 24-hour help line, and arranged for me to pick up my card the next morning at the bank's main branch. I thanked him, not quite believing my card would be there. The next morning, I turned up at Hansapank to find at the help desk a six-foot-two-inch Estonian Amazon so glowingly blonde she appeared to be irradiated. I made sheepish mention of my plight, upon which she smiled, reached into her desk, withdrew an envelope, and, after a cursory scan of my passport, handed me my bank card.

NEVERTHELESS, I WONDERED: Was Estonia's stylishness actually some geoeconomic version of keeping up with the Joneses of the Western world? I was told more than once in Tallinn that the luxury sedans tooling around the city were, in many cases, piloted by people who could not afford them. I had no-

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ticed Tallinn's many bookstores and art galleries, but, when I actually spoke to some Estonian writers and artists, I was told that the nation's literary and art circles, while lively, were often as cliquish and status-conscious as a SoHo loft party. The story of Skype, the pride of Estonia, is also more complicated than that of a brainy Estonian phoenix rising from a heap of Soviet ash. Skype originated when a duo of Swedish investors came to Estonia in search of cheap programming talent. So, while the talent was local—and Estonians did indeed write the code—the funding and the idea behind that funding was not.

Thus, a couple of months later, I went back to Tallinn during the winter to discover a meteorologically literal darkness at noon. I was forced to note, for the first time, that Tallinn nearly shares a line of latitude with Iqaluit, the capital of the Canadian Arctic territory of Nunavut. The city's stripped trees stood against an unrelentingly sunless gray canvas. Drizzle was constant; it had apparently begun raining two weeks before I arrived. Tallinn's main square was decked out to look like one of those dispiriting little U.S. towns where Christmas is celebrated year-round. The people of Tallinn themselves were glumly hidden within designer winter coats as puffy as soufflés. The clubs, cafés, and restaurants where I had so enjoyed myself had names that now seemed desperate and effortful: Bar Bogart, Hollywood, Stereo.

I sought out Scott Diel, the editor-in-chief of Tallinn's *City Paper*, the Baltic region's must-read English-language magazine. Diel, a former Peace Corps volunteer once stationed in Estonia, has spent ten years living in the country, and I hoped he could revive my flagging admiration for his adopted home. Estonia, I told him, was without question the most pleasant and most advanced of the former Soviet republics—but could beating out Kazakhstan and Armenia really be considered that wondrous?

"The stuff you see in the press about Estonia," Diel told me, "about the Miracle Republic—most of it really is true. Estonia's unofficial goal is to become one of the five richest nations in Europe." Could that happen? "They'll never be richer than Switzerland, but it's not impossible to imagine that they'll come close. Estonia is still pretty homogeneous, with a government that agrees on the core issues. That's Estonia's secret. It's not that divided. Estonia wants to be Western." Diel's biggest impetus for staying in Estonia, he told me, other than his predictably lovely Estonian wife, was "lifestyle." But, when I expressed some curiosity about possibly moving with my girlfriend to Tallinn, Diel advised: "Make sure she comes in the summer."

ESTONIA, I INITIALLY thought, had managed to forge a real place for its ethnic Russians—unlike many former Soviet republics, whose ethnic populace sneers at the Russians with whom they grew up. Today, 26 percent of Estonia's inhabitants are ethnic Russians. Yet, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western nations had to urge Estonia not to expel them. Estonia didn't offer most of its Russians automatic citizenship; Russians born in Estonia before 1992 have to pass a language test and suffer questions about Estonia's new constitution. This sounds much easier than it is: Estonian is a Finno-Ugric language—which means that, other than Hungarian and Finnish, it has no widely spoken relatives—and the U.S. State Department ranks it as one of the world's more difficult languages. ("You have to be really smart to be Estonian," one Estonian told me.) Many Russians have refused to take the citizenship test, and a good number of those who have still don't fully identify as Estonian. "Russian children," an émigré Estonian businessman named Jüri Estam wrote recently in *City Paper*, "are being raised in Estonia in the spirit of denial."

In one of Tallinn's central parks stands the Tõnismäe Monument, which is home to a bronze statue of a Soviet soldier. This was thrown up during Soviet times to commemorate the "liberation" of Estonia from Nazi rule on September 22, 1944. In actual fact, the Soviets crushed the five-day-old independent government of Otto Tief and shot or dispatched to Siberia most of his ministers. The statue is, today, an annual gathering place for Tallinn's Russian population, most of whom refuse to acknowledge the reality of the malign and unwanted Soviet takeover—perhaps believing, however subconsciously, that Estonia remains a Russian colonial possession. This feeling is not mutual. Most Estonians loathe the statue—Estam was actually arrested in May when, during a counterdemonstration, he crossed a police barricade in an attempt to display the national flag of Estonia in what he calls "a respectful manner"—but the Estonian government refuses, for some reason, to remove it. Some claim this is because many within Estonia's parliament are unduly influenced by Russians; others maintain that the politics of confrontation is simply not the Estonian way. All of which meant that the tolerant ethnic wonderland I had wanted to see on my first visit was in fact riven by some depressingly familiar complications.

"Estonians would kill me for saying this," Hillar Lauri, a Canadian-born ethnic Estonian who relocated to Tallinn in 1991, told me, "but it is essential to the Estonian psyche to say that we are not Russian. And this country is about proving that Estonia is not Russia. How do you prove it? By working harder, by reforming, by changing." Near-Shoring, Lauri's Tallinn-based company, does accounting for non-Estonian businesses operating in Estonia. His work, combined with his Canadian upbringing, gives him a panoramic view of both how far Estonia has come and how much further it needs to go. "Any area that is state-regulated," he went on, "is corrupt. Hospitals and health care are terribly unreformed areas. ... But it takes time. There are a thousand Soviet mindsets that linger."

"Estonia was an independent republic between the two world wars," Andrus Viirg, the director for Foreign Investments and Trade Promotion for Enterprise Estonia, explained to me. "This mentality has helped us because of the existing memory of a market economy and democracy.

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The cultural closeness to Finland also helped. We were able to watch Finnish TV. No territory under the Soviet Union had this opportunity. After regaining our independence, it was very easy for the government to proceed with Western ideas."

NATIONS MAY OR may not get the governments they deserve, but Estonia's has been stable and occasionally inspired. Its first independent president, the reform-minded Lennart Meri, did much to create Estonia's vaunted democratic transparency. Meri, who died in 2006, referred to politicians who got rich while in office as "scum on the surface of the state cauldron" and once held an apologetic press conference within a public toilet when he learned that a Japanese diplomat had complained about Estonia's then-appalling (though typically Soviet) public restrooms. Meri's 2001 successor, Arnold Rüütel—a former communist widely renowned for the snores he pulled from audiences while speaking—had a mildly scandal-plagued tenure as president, but, even under his decrepit hand, Estonia joined the European Union and its economy grew at a rate of around 6 percent per year. Ilves, the current president, is widely admired, and his fondness for polymathic rhetoric has made it clear there will be no looking back. The Estonian economy, Viirg told me, especially in terms of foreign investment, "is very strong." Most of this investment—eleven billion euros between 1992 and 2005—has come from Sweden and Finland. "If we start calculating foreign investment per capita," Viirg went on, "Estonia is [one of the very] strongest performers among the new EU member countries." Estonia's GDP growth is currently running at 10 percent per year, which places it in the ranks of China and India, with virtually none of those countries' festering social ills.

It should be said that, even during Soviet times, Estonia had what was by far the highest standard of living among all the Soviet republics; it was where Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn went to complete *The Gulag Archipelago* in peace and quiet. Its success, then, is not really all that surprising. What is surprising is that Estonia suffered occupation by two of the twentieth century's most monstrous regimes and, rather than succumb to the sickness of totalitarianism, developed some rather potent antibodies. In Estonia, the secret police basically no longer exist; most of the investigations headed by KAPO, its internal security force, are focused on software piracy rather than dissidents' e-mail. Beyond the velvet ropes of its exclusive nightclubs, Estonia might not be the most exuberant place on earth, and its winters may be the atmospheric equivalent of a Bergman film, but it is blessed in many more important areas. Estonia's greatest blessing might well turn out to be the degree to which its hard-won liberty has heightened the awareness of what its people can now freely achieve in this world. In the decidedly unmessianic Estonian air is something I have not sensed in my own country in a long time. It feels, in a word, sane. ■

Neoliberal utopia awaits.

Great Danes

BY JONATHAN COHN

"IF YOU WANT a lower standard of living," conservative policy experts Grace-Marie Turner and Robert Moffit wrote in an op-ed last week, "the Europeans have the right prescription." The topic of discussion was universal health care, but it just as easily might have been government-sponsored child care or generous unemployment benefits. The failure of the European welfare state is, after all, an article of faith among conservatives, from Robert Samuelson ("Europe is history's has-been") to Jonah Goldberg ("Europe has an asthmatic economy") to David Brooks ("[T]he European model is flat-out unsustainable").

The argument generally goes like this. Nowadays, every nation faces a stark but straightforward choice: It can admit that globalization demands a fluid economy—in which people will lose jobs frequently and incomes are bound to be more volatile—and adapt by slashing taxes, government benefit programs, and trade barriers. Or it can try to hold on to old-fashioned notions of lifetime job security and guaranteed incomes by blocking out trading partners, closely regulating business activity, and maintaining a generous welfare state—a formula sure to produce sluggish growth, chronic unemployment, and crippling government debt.

Given their political agenda, it's easy to see why conservatives would be attracted to this analysis. But, even as the pundits wring their hands at Europe's economic decline, a growing number of American economists have begun looking across the pond for inspiration—to Scandinavia and, especially, to Denmark. Over the last decade, the Danes have turned the conventional wisdom on its head by boasting not only one of the world's most expansive welfare states, but also one of its most robust economies. Given the way average American workers' wages continue to stagnate even as their burden of risk—of losing a job, of losing medical insurance—continues to rise, it looks increasingly as though the conservative triumphalism has been misplaced: It may be that Europe has something to teach us after all. And Democrats, who have come back into power promising to address economic insecurity, should be sure to listen.

AS IN MOST of the developed world, Denmark's welfare state traces its origins to the Great Depression—specifically, to a dank January morning in 1933 when Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning called several of the country's political leaders to his apartment for a private session to discuss the nation's growing economic crisis. As Eric Einhorn and John Logue recount in a forthcoming essay on Danish history, nearly

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half the population was out of work and farm foreclosures were widespread. With communism and socialism gaining popularity among the increasingly distressed population, Stauning and his colleagues were desperate to take actions that would not only alleviate the widespread suffering but also save capitalism itself.

Stauning's apartment was on a small, quiet street named Kanslergade. And the resulting "Kanslergade compromise," as it came to be known, would give birth to the contemporary Danish welfare state. Denmark always had an egalitarian tradition, rooted partly in its strong ethnic identity. But, prior to the 1930s, fulfilling that guarantee was largely the responsibility of private associations, organized around jobs or communities. The Kanslergade compromise changed all that. Henceforth, the government would take primary responsibility for making the economy work—and making sure that it worked for everybody—by, among other things, providing a set of social insurance programs that protected against illness and unemployment.

The strategy succeeded. Denmark's political center held, Danes got back to work, and, on the eve of World War II, the economy was back on track. The country continued to thrive after the interlude of Nazi wartime occupation and, from the 1950s through the 1970s, it generally had steady, strong growth. The more the economy grew, the more money the government collected through taxes—allowing it to provide, in turn, even more generous services. By the '70s, Denmark had developed a well-earned reputation for providing what was arguably Europe's most comprehensive and lavish set of welfare benefits.

But the Danish economic model—like those across Europe and in the United States—was challenged by "stagflation" in the '70s and globalization in the 1980s. Denmark's economy, like those in most of Europe, started lagging behind that of the United States. While Americans were going back to work—and, in some celebrated cases, getting fabulously rich—millions of Europeans were joining the ranks of the chronically unemployed, living off of generous welfare payments. Meanwhile, businesses, hamstrung in some countries by rules that made it difficult to hire and fire new workers, weren't investing or creating new jobs.

But, while most of Europe continued staunchly to resist change, the Scandinavians began to embrace it—led, once again, by Denmark. In the early '80s, with unemployment in double digits and the economy slowing to a crawl, voters threw their support behind the Danish conservatives, enabling them to oust the Social Democrats who had run the country for most of the postwar period. Although the conservatives were not very far to the right by U.S. standards, they had run on a platform of rescuing the Danish economy, which they vowed to do by privatizing some government services, modestly reducing welfare benefits, and bringing down government deficits. And, for a few years, they made some headway, particularly when it came to trimming the pension system and bringing the government budgets back into balance.

By the early '90s, the economy had recovered enough—and the public's enthusiasm for the conservatives had waned enough—to swing politics back in the other direction. The Social Democrats took power once again, this time under the leadership of Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, a close ally of Denmark's organized labor movement. But, contrary to the expectations of some supporters, Rasmussen didn't abandon the conservative reforms. Instead, in a classic Nixon-to-China move, he undertook some of the very measures that the conservative coalition had proposed but could not enact on its own.

One of these was the sale of Denmark's state-owned telephone company, which, relative to the size of the country's economy, represented one of the largest efforts at privatization in Europe for the entire decade. Rasmussen also remained committed to balanced budgets, making more low-level spending cuts to keep the budget in line. But perhaps most important were the reforms Rasmussen's Social Democrats introduced to the Danish unemployment system. Previously, unemployment benefits had been not only very generous—equal, in some cases, to 90 percent of lost wages—but also essentially unlimited. Under a new scheme pushed through by the Social Democrats, the government began limiting assistance to four years—and, even then, only on the condition that beneficiaries worked or enrolled in job training.

Essentially, Rasmussen was triangulating between the two main poles of the country's political debate, in a manner much like the one Bill Clinton was employing in the United States at roughly the same time. But, because politics in Denmark were generally far to the left of the United States, the resulting compromise actually looked quite different. Relative to Clinton's welfare reform, Rasmussen's invested much more money in worker-counseling and training. The explicit goal was to recognize a social compact: Just as the unemployed were obligated to find new jobs, so the government was obligated to make sure the jobs were there (even if it meant creating them on the public payroll) and that the unemployed received proper training to succeed. Today, largely as a result of Rasmussen's reforms, Denmark spends more than 4 percent of its GDP on its labor market programs—the most of any country in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and more than 20 times what the United States spends on its worker-training programs.

In some respects, though, what was most significant about Rasmussen's agenda was what it did not include: radical changes to the welfare state. And that explains why, today, the country has programs that remain among the most generous in the developed world. There is universal health care and child care. Lengthy maternity and paternity leaves are available. And, despite the time limit, unemployment benefits are still worth up to 90 percent of lost wages. In all, Denmark spends nearly one-third of gross domestic product on government-run benefits—among the highest in the developed world and more than twice what the United

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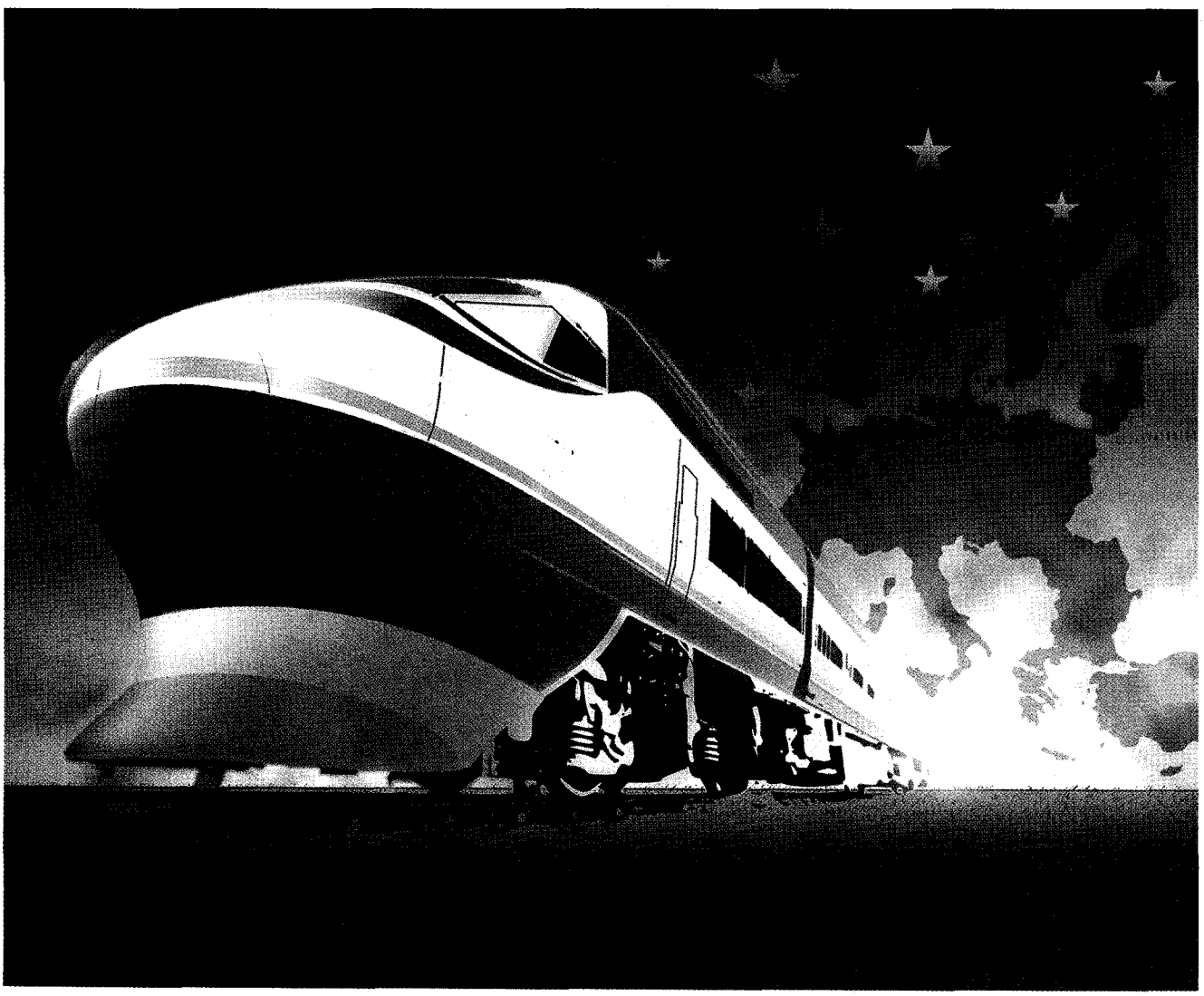
States spends. Naturally, Denmark has a tax burden to match: Half of the country's annual economic output goes through government in the form of taxes—again, among the highest in the developed world and well above the U.S. rate of just under 30 percent.

IF YOU BELIEVE the conservative rhetoric on economics, this combination of high taxes, a large public sector, and lavish welfare benefits ought to be killing the Danish economy. But it's not. In fact, Denmark's economy has thrived. And nowhere is that more apparent than in the job market. By the time Rasmussen left office in 2001, the unemployment rate had fallen from a 1994 peak of 9.6 percent to 4.3 percent; in 2002, it fell below the U.S. rate, where it has remained ever since. For the most recent quarter of 2006, Denmark's standardized unemployment rate was 3.6 percent, compared with 4.7 percent in the United States. Moreover, while Europe has a reputation for fostering cadres of idle youth (a reputation that, in countries like France, has at least some basis in reality), in Denmark, a mere 3 percent of its 15- to 19-year-olds are neither in school nor working—the second-best rate in the developed world. (Tiny Luxembourg is first.) In the United States, by comparison, the figure is about 7 percent.

Another important measure of overall economic health is GDP per capita, which in effect approximates the wealth generated per person per year. Here, the United States remains near the top of the developed world, at $39,732. Denmark, though also in the top fifth of the OECD, is at just $31,932. It's a significant difference, but one that reflects, in part, the fact that Americans simply work more hours, don't get as much vacation, and can't take such generous pregnancy or sick leaves. GDP per capita is also an average, pulled up by the extraordinary wealth of America's elite. Once you consider the distribution of income and material goods, it becomes apparent that typical citizens in Denmark are doing as well as—and quite possibly better than—their American counterparts.

Nearly 80 percent of Danish households have access to a home computer, the second-highest proportion in the world; just 62 percent of U.S. households can make the same claim. And, while the United States scores a bit higher than



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Denmark on the U.N. "Human Development Index," which combines financial standard of living with measures like knowledge and life expectancy, Denmark bests the United States on the "Quality of Life" index, which the Economist Intelligence Unit devised to measure a similar combination of factors. One reason Denmark scores so well is that programs like universal health care and day care mean middle-class Danes don't carry around the same sort of anxieties that their American counterparts do. The existence of such programs also helps explain the most obvious economic difference between Denmark and the United States: America's poverty rate of 17.1 percent is the second-worst in the OECD, behind only Mexico. And Denmark's? It's 4.3 percent, tied with the Czech Republic for the best on the planet.

To critics, the trouble with large welfare programs isn't so much what they do today as what they promise to do tomorrow: Since aging populations will eventually claim more in benefits than younger generations of workers are projected to generate, the programs appear unsustainable. In the general sense, this claim has some truth. The money Denmark owes its future retirees, in the form of pensions and health benefits, will indeed put a huge claim on its treasury—one it's not yet fully prepared to meet. But Denmark is in a far better position to meet those obligations than many other countries, including, yet again, the United States. As it has for several years, Denmark is presently running a small budget surplus, equal to around .65 percent of its GDP. The United States, of course, is running large deficits, in the neighborhood of 4.5 percent of GDP—which is one reason our long-term financial liabilities are more severe, too.

So what have the Danes figured out that conservative American pundits haven't? "High taxes don't hurt [by themselves]," says Harvard's Richard Freeman, a highly respected labor economist who has studied Europe extensively. "It depends on what you are getting for the money." Medical care is the most obvious example of this. Danes have lower infant-mortality rates than Americans and, statistically speaking, live just as long. You can't pin that completely on the medical system (a lot has to do with poverty, diet, and so on), but it certainly suggests Danish health care is no worse than the U.S. version. Yet we Americans pay far more for our system, because it's riddled with inefficiencies as insurance companies compete with one another to enroll healthy beneficiaries, rather than finance good care.

Another thing the government does well is spend money on projects whose benefits are too long-term, or too spread-out, to attract sufficient private investment. Worker-training is a case in point. One of the great virtues of Denmark's worker-retraining program is the way it enables even middle-aged workers to shift gears and pick up a new profession: If, for example, you're an unemployed textile worker whose best prospect for a new job in two years lies in health care, then the Danish government will pay to train you as a physician's assistant.

Just as a well-educated workforce attracts foreign investment, so does strong infrastructure—whether it's in the form of good roads or a speedy information highway. Here, too, Denmark excels. And here, too, government can take considerable credit, as the Economist Intelligence Unit noted in its glowing write-up: "High public spending also translates to an excellent infrastructure. ... Denmark has emerged as a global leader in the development of information and communications technology infrastructure, and a pioneer for wireless technologies, including Bluetooth, among others."

Of course, infrastructure is only part of the story—and a modest one at that. A bigger reason, ironically enough, is the tax code. The high rates on personal income, which max out at 63 percent, mask relatively low rates on investment capital and corporate earnings. That relative balance—with investment taxed less than wages—is what many economists prefer, since, theoretically, low taxes on corporations will encourage them to invest more, creating more jobs, and so on. The reason Danes tolerate such high income taxes, even while corporate taxes are low, is that they feel like they're getting something for the money: good public services. In effect, the generosity of the welfare state creates political room for economic policies that foster higher growth.

That's also true in the larger sense, when it comes to the rules—or lack thereof—about hiring and firing. Studies have shown that Danes change jobs more frequently than their counterparts elsewhere in Europe and that, on the whole, they have the shortest tenures. With such a volatile job market, you might expect the Danes to clamor for the same kinds of protections as, say, the French or Germans. But they haven't. The main reason, everyone seems to agree, is that the combination of welfare programs and job-training means that the newly unemployed needn't fear becoming destitute. Indeed, in some cases, losing a job is actually a way to get a step up. Polls show that, despite the high rates of job turnover, Danes are among the most optimistic about their prospects for finding work again. As Stein Kuhnle, an expert on Denmark who now teaches at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin, explains: "One may say that the Danish system is one promoting *employment* security rather than *job* security" (my italics).

Earlier this year, an article in *The Wall Street Journal* on the closure of a Danish meatpacking plant illustrated how fluid labor markets and generous welfare supports produce a virtuous cycle. As soon as the factory was shuttered, the famous Danish job placement and training system went to work. Counselors met with each of the newly unemployed workers, drawing up individual plans of action for each and then monitoring the "clients" to make sure they followed through on their plans. Then, using both state money and some contributions from the old employer, they financed classes to retrain the workforce. The results were impressive: After having spent ten years slicing up pig carcasses,

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Suzanne Olsen now had a position as a golf landscaping apprentice. Finn Larsen was enrolled in classes to become fully trained as a math and science teacher. Indeed, of the 500 workers the company had laid off, within ten months only 60 were still collecting Denmark's generous unemployment benefits.

TALKING UP ONE region's, or one country's, economic model is a recurring phenomenon in politics—and a tricky one. At various times in the last 50 years, the opinion elite has swooned over the Anglo-American countries, the Far East, continental Europe, and even the communist bloc because their economies were in the middle of a temporary boom. But even "successful" countries often have problems that admirers either overlook or willfully ignore. And Denmark has its share of those. To take one obvious example, because the generous unemployment benefits and job-training means nobody wants to work in low-wage jobs, the country's service sector is lackluster. Positions like housekeepers and nannies tend to be filled by immigrants operating as part of an underground economy. "We have a vibrant public sector," says Christoffer Green-Pedersen, a professor of public policy at the University of Copenhagen. "But I've never seen a shoe shiner. It'd be too expensive."

A bigger issue for those who might want to import the Danish model—particularly for a country like the United States—is that Denmark is a small, ethnically homogenous country with a tradition of marked cooperation. Labor and management enjoy one of the least adversarial relationships in the developed world, enabling them to pursue mutually advantageous arrangements. Many experts think the strong sense of common enterprise among Danes improves government services by promoting a strong sense of duty among civil servants.

Still, nobody is suggesting that other countries could—or even should—import the Danish model whole. (Among other things, the strong sense of common purpose has an uglier side: relatively harsh treatment of foreigners and immigrants.) The idea, rather, is to take broad lessons from Denmark's experience. And the broadest lesson would seem to be the most obvious one: that it is entirely possible to have a large welfare state, with generous benefits, without choking the economy. Data from the rest of Scandinavia, which all use variants of the same economic model, support this argument. In a recent *Scientific American* column focusing on the performance of these Nordic countries, Columbia University economist and best-selling author Jeffrey Sachs blasted the right's anti-tax, anti-government conventional wisdom, concluding that "a generous social-welfare state is not a road to serfdom but rather to high levels of satisfaction, fairness, economic equality and international competitiveness."

Nor is Sachs the only prominent economist who has taken notice of Scandinavia's success. So have Harvard's Richard Freeman and Nobel Prize–winner Joseph Stiglitz, the former chief economist for the World Bank. Even some relatively conservative economists—like the American Enterprise Institute's Kevin Hassett, who has been an adviser to John McCain—will concede that the Nordic model works, although they are dubious that the United States could copy it: "The Scandinavians," Hassett says, "show that you don't have to have a terrible economy if you have a big welfare state and high taxes."

SCANDINAVIA'S SUCCESS HAS particular relevance today, when the Democratic Party suddenly finds itself with real political power again—and a mandate to address the rising economic insecurity that many American workers feel. The problem for the Democrats, as my colleague Jonathan Chait recently noted ("Freakoutonomics," November 6), is that the solutions they've pushed for in the last decade suddenly seem inadequate. For most of the 1990s, the Clinton administration pursued a relatively conservative set of economic policies that focused on efforts to improve overall growth, such as free trade and balanced budgets. Most economists believe Clinton's economic policies did, in fact, strengthen the economy as a whole. But it's also becoming apparent that the poor and middle class didn't benefit from the subsequent period of growth as much as the administration had hoped—and that both groups remain surprisingly vulnerable to economic dislocation today.

Of course, even back in the early '90s, not every member of the Clinton administration was so sanguine about the policies it was pursuing at the time. Among those dissenting was then–Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, who proposed that "if we blended our flexible labor markets with [Europe's] investments in human capital and put the safety net somewhere in between ours and theirs, you would have the best system in the world." Reich's argument famously lost out to those of Clinton's more conservative advisers—among them former National Economic Council Chairman Laura Tyson and former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin.

And so it was a little ironic that, a few weeks ago, it was Tyson and Rubin, along with some other former Clinton advisers, who found themselves discussing Denmark at a panel on economic policy co-sponsored by THE NEW REPUBLIC and the Brookings Institution. Tyson, who just completed five years as dean of the London Business School, first raised the possibility that Denmark might be a model for the United States, noting that "there is nothing in the growth rates to suggest that Denmark is paying a penalty for having a high level [of taxes and government spending]. ... This is not to mention in addition the fact that health care coverage in Denmark is universal, and it is not to mention the fact that, actually, Denmark has one of the lowest poverty rates in Europe and has the lowest poverty rates for children in all of the OECD countries."

Upon hearing that description, Rubin quipped, "I think I would like to move to Denmark." That, surely, isn't necessary. But a fact-finding visit might be worthwhile. ■

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Taking Mormonism seriously.

The Big Test

BY DAMON LINKER

WITHIN DAYS OF stepping down as governor of Massachusetts on January 4, Mitt Romney is expected to announce his candidacy for president. Shortly after that, Romney will almost certainly need to deliver a major speech about his Mormon faith—a speech in the mold of John F. Kennedy's 1960 address to the Baptist ministers of Houston, Texas, in which the candidate attempted to reassure voters that they had no reason to fear his Catholicism. Yet Romney's task will be much more complicated. Whereas Kennedy set voters' minds at ease by declaring in unambiguous terms that he considered the separation of church and state to be "absolute," Romney intends to run for president as the candidate of the religious right, which believes in blurring the distinction between politics and religion. Romney thus needs to convince voters that they have nothing to fear from his Mormonism while simultaneously placing that faith at the core of his identity and his quest for the White House.

This is a task that may very well prove impossible. Romney's strategy relies on the assumption that public suspicion of his Mormonism—a recent poll showed that 43 percent of Americans would never vote for a Mormon—is rooted in ignorance and that this suspicion will therefore diminish as voters learn more about his faith. It is far more likely, however, that as citizens educate themselves about the political implications of Mormon theology, concerns about the possibility of a Mormon president will actually *increase*. And these apprehensions will be extremely difficult to dispel—because they will be thoroughly justified.

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT has been enormously successful at convincing journalists not to raise questions about the political implications of a candidate's religious beliefs. Analyzing the dangers of generic "religion" to the nation's political life is considered perfectly acceptable—indeed, it has become a cottage industry in recent years—but exploring the complicated interactions between politics and the theological outlooks of specific religious traditions supposedly smacks of bigotry. The focus on Kennedy's Catholicism in 1960, for example, is today widely derided as a shameful expression of anti-Catholic prejudice that ought never to be repeated.

This is unfortunate. However useful and necessary it may be to engage in theoretical reflection on politics and "religion," the fact is that there is no such thing as religion in the abstract. There are, rather, particular religious traditions, each of which has its own distinctive history of political engagement (or disengagement, as the case may be). And, certainly, the political history of pre–Vatican II Catholicism—with its overt hostility to modernity, democracy, liberalism, and religious "error," as well as its emphasis on the absolute authority of the Pope in matters of faith and morals—raised perfectly legitimate questions and concerns about what it would mean for the United States to elect a Catholic to the nation's highest office.

A very different, though arguably more troubling, set of questions and concerns are posed by the prospect of the nation electing a president who is an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). In some ways, Catholicism and Mormonism present diametrically opposed political challenges to liberal democracy. With Kennedy's faith, the concern was over the extent of his deference to a foreign ecclesiastical authority. The genuine and profound loyalty of Mormons to the United States and its political system is, by contrast, undeniable. Indeed, LDS patriotism flows directly from Mormon theology. And that is precisely the problem.

With few exceptions, America's Christian, Jewish, and Islamic communities have roots in Europe and the Middle East. However Americanized these communities may be in doctrine and spiritual outlook, their theologies ultimately derive from older and richer traditions that predate the United States. This is true even of the many branches of Protestantism that began and flourished in the New World, nearly all of which have built on Calvinist theological motifs.

Not so for Mormonism. Radicalizing traditional Protestant worries about corruption in the historic church, the religion founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith in upstate New York has understood itself from the beginning to be a "great restoration" of authentic Christianity after an 1,800-year "apostasy" that began with the death of the original apostles. That this restoration took place in the United States was no accident, according to Mormon theology. Smith produced a 500-page document, *The Book of Mormon*, containing the record of an ancient civilization, descended from the biblical Israelites, that supposedly lived,

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flourished, and collapsed in the Americas 1,000 years before the arrival of Christopher Columbus. Jesus Christ visited these people after his resurrection in Jerusalem, spreading his gospel in the New World and planting the seeds of its rebirth many centuries later by Smith himself.

In later revelations, Smith went even further in placing the United States—both geographically and politically—at the focal point of sacred history. The Garden of Eden, he claimed, was located in Jackson County, Missouri. The American Founders were "raised up" by God in order to establish a free government that would allow the restoration to occur and the LDS Church to spread the restored gospel throughout the nation and the world. (Accordingly, all 30,000 undergraduates at LDS-owned Brigham Young University (BYU) are required to take "American Heritage"—a course that teaches the "American system of government and institutions in the context of the Restored Gospel.")

The centrality of the United States to Mormon theology extends beyond the past and present to encompass the end times as well. Like many of the religious groups to emerge from the Second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century, Mormons are millennialists who believe themselves to be living in the years just prior to the second coming of Christ; hence the words "latter day" in the church's official title. Where the LDS differs from other communities gripped by eschatology, however, is in the vital role it envisions the United States playing in the end times. The Mormon "Articles of Faith" teach that, when Christ returns, he will reign "personally upon the earth" for 1,000 years, and LDS interpretations of a passage in Isaiah have led some to conclude that this rule will be directed from two locations—one in Jerusalem and the other in "Zion" (the United States). This belief has caused Mormons to view U.S. politics as a stage on which the ultimate divine drama is likely to play itself out, with a Mormon in the leading role. Joseph Smith certainly thought so, which at least partially explains why he spent the final months of his life—he was gunned down by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, on June 27, 1844—running for president of the United States.

MORMONS DIFFER FROM mainstream Christians in another respect as well: their emphasis on the centrality of prophecy. Christianity in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions holds that direct revelation ended many centuries ago, before the scriptural canon was closed in the late fourth century. Numerous heterodox movements have made contrary claims, of course, but Mormonism is unique in the emphasis it places on prophetic utterances. Not only was the religion founded by a self-proclaimed prophet who brought forth new works of scripture (*The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*) and even rewrote ("retranslated") passages of the canonical Old and New Testaments in light of his personal revelations; but the man who holds the office of the president of the LDS Church is also considered to be a prophet—"the mouthpiece of God on Earth," in the words of Mormon theologian and Apostle Bruce McConkie—whose statements override both scripture and tradition.

The truly radical implications of this view were brought home to me during two years (1998–2000) I spent as a (non-Mormon) visiting professor in the political science department at BYU. Like good teachers everywhere, another non-Mormon colleague and I posed moral and ethical dilemmas in our classes in order to encourage our students to reflect on the character of the beliefs they brought to the classroom. What would they do, we wondered, if the prophet in Salt Lake City commanded them to commit murder in the name of their faith, much as the God of the Old Testament supposedly instructed the ancient Israelites to wipe out the Canaanites? More than one pious young Mormon invariably responded by declaring that he would execute the prophet's commands, no matter what.

The point is not that Americans need to beware a covert genocidal plot by Mormons. On the contrary, LDS prophetic declarations since the late nineteenth century have tended to moderate church teaching, moving the community into greater conformity with mainstream American values—abolishing polygamy in 1890, for instance, and opening the Mormon priesthood to black members of the church in 1978. Yet the response of the BYU students nevertheless points to a potentially dangerous problem in LDS theology—namely that, by elevating prophecy above other sources of revealed truth and by insisting that the words of a prophet supersede mainstream Christian as well as established LDS scripture and tradition, Mormonism opens the door to prophetically inspired acts and innovations, the content of which cannot be predetermined in any way.

Thoughtful Mormons are well-aware of this problem, but the peculiarities of the church and its founding make devising a solution extremely difficult. One option would be for the LDS Church to follow the lead of the Catholic Church in developing a tradition of philosophical reflection on natural law or some other moral ideal to which God and his prophets are assumed to be bound or co-equal. This rationalist tradition could then be used to check the veracity of prophetic pronouncements. The difficulty, however, is that Smith encouraged his followers to cultivate suspicion of philosophy. Mormons assume that the centuries-long "apostasy" that preceded Smith was caused in large part by the rationalizing of faith that took place in the early church. According to Smith, it was questions like the one Socrates posed to Euthyphro—does God love what is good because it is good, or is it good because God loves it?—that led the church fathers and early church councils into theological and doctrinal errors that corrupted Christianity for nearly 18 centuries. To this day, the Mormon church teaches genuine respect for reason only when it operates within the narrow limits set for it by LDS prophecy.

But the obstacles to Mormons developing a binding moral theory go beyond the church's generalized suspicion of autonomous reason; their concept of God seems to deny

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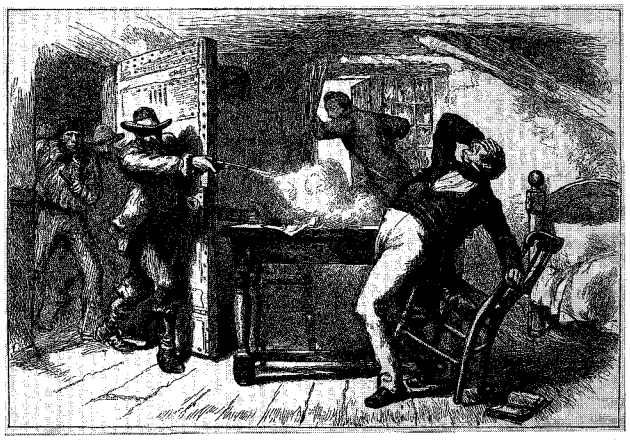
the very possibility of such a theory. Unlike the God of Catholics and Protestants—who is usually portrayed as the transcendent, all-powerful, all-good, and all-wise creator of the temporal universe out of nothingness—Smith's God is a finite being who evolved into his present state of divinity from a condition very much like our own and then merely "organized" preexisting matter in order to form the world. As a result of this highly unorthodox revelation, there is simply no room for a natural morality in Mormon theology, since Mormonism tacitly denies that the natural world possesses any intrinsic or God-given moral purpose. Everything we know—or could ever know—about right and wrong comes entirely from divine commands communicated to humanity by prophets. The idea of appealing to a higher principle against the word of a prophet—the idea, in other words, of using one's own mind to cast moral or intellectual doubt on the veracity of a prophetic pronouncement—therefore makes no sense in the Mormon conceptual universe.

These limitations have led some leaders of the church to propose that Mormons should look to the currently accepted canon of scriptures revealed by Smith as the standard by which to assess all future revelations. In the words of Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth president of the church, official LDS scriptural texts should be used as "the measuring yardsticks, or balances, by which we measure every man's doctrine." This moderate and moderating view remains a controversial position in the church, however, and for good reason. None other than Joseph Smith and his successor-prophet Brigham Young seemed to take a different stance toward the authority of revelation. Compared with "living oracles," Young declared, canonical works of scripture "are nothing," because they "do not convey the word of God direct to us now, as do the words of a Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation." To which Smith replied, "Brother Brigham has told you the word of the Lord, and he has told you the truth."

It is impossible to know how Mormons will resolve this significant tension over the coming years. The church's current president, 96-year-old Gordon B. Hinckley, has certainly shown no sign of theological radicalism during his eleven-year tenure as prophet. As those who have caught one of his many jovial appearances on "Larry King Live" will have noted, Hinckley is an exceedingly unthreatening figure. And whoever succeeds him may very well prove to be equally anodyne. In practice, the rigidly hierarchical institutional structure of the LDS Church—with the prophet as well as the two counselors with whom he shares the "First Presidency" drawn from the "Quorum of Twelve Apostles"—is remarkably effective at enforcing theological conservatism. It is simply very difficult to rise to the top of the organization without being a consummate company man.



The "presidential assassination" of ur-Mormon Joseph Smith; The Mormon Tabernacle Choir sings Mitt Romney's praises; Mitt Romney takes to the stump for God and Country.

Yet the fact remains that, as it is currently constituted, Mormonism lacks the intellectual or spiritual resources to challenge a declaration of the prophet who runs the church, regardless of how theologically or morally outrageous that declaration might be. Members of the church may insist that non-Mormons have nothing to worry about, since God would never issue an immoral edict, but that is quite obviously a matter of faith—a faith that non-Mormons do not share. As long as the LDS Church continues to insist that its leader serves as a direct conduit from God—a God whose ways are, to a considerable extent, inscrutable to human reason—Mormonism will remain a theologically unstable, and thus politically perilous, religion.

TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES; AFP PHOTO/GEORGE FREY/NEWSCOM

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ARTICLE VI of the U.S. Constitution famously stipulates that "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." Though the Framers meant to prohibit a test compelling office-seekers to affirm a particular set of religious views, it makes sense to treat the proscription as applying negatively as well—as prohibiting a test that would exclude members of certain religious sects from holding office. In our time of heightened sectarian tensions—when devout believers and secularists increasingly perceive themselves to be stationed on opposite sides of a cultural chasm—it is crucially important that Americans remain committed to allowing every qualified citizen to run for public office, regardless of his or her religious views.

But defending the constitutional right of every qualified citizen to run for office is not the same as saying that a candidate's religious views should be a matter of indifference to voters. In the case of Mitt Romney, citizens have every reason to seek clarification about the character of his Mormonism. Does he believe, for example, that we are living through the "latter days" of human history, just prior to the second coming of Christ? And does he think that, when the Lord returns, he will rule over the world from the territory of the United States? Does Romney believe that the president of the Mormon Church is a genuine prophet of God? If so, how would he respond to a command from this prophet on matters of public policy? And, if his faith would require him to follow this hypothetical command, would it not be accurate to say that, under a President Romney, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints would truly be in charge of the country—with its leadership having final say on matters of right and wrong?

One suspects that, if pressed in this way, Romney would seek to assure voters that he would never follow such a command if it conflicted in any way with his oath of office. How such a statement would square with his professed Mormon faith is far from clear, however. Under modern conditions, some religions—Protestantism, post–Vatican II Catholicism, Judaism—have spawned liberal traditions that treat faith primarily as a repository of moral wisdom instead of as a source of absolute truth. Other religions, by contrast, have tended to require believers to accept everything or nothing at all. Mormonism (like Islam, another faith founded in prophecy) is one of the latter, binary religions. When a Mormon stops accepting the binding truth of prophetic revelation, he effectively becomes a lapsed Mormon.

At the beginning of his political career, that description seemed to fit Romney pretty well. In his failed bid to unseat Senator Edward Kennedy in 1994, Romney responded to questions about his faith by stating that he was not running "to be a spokesman for my church." In the same campaign, Romney also asserted that states should be free to decide whether to allow same-sex marriage, and he demonized Republican "extremists" for seeking to "force their beliefs on others." These remarks would be unusual for any devout Mormon, but they are especially noteworthy because Romney made them at a time when the LDS Church was actively working to ensure that Hawaii would not become the first state in the nation to—in the words of a church statement issued in February 1994—"give legal authorization or other official approval or support to marriages between persons of the same gender." Even on abortion—the issue that, more than any other, unites conservative Catholics, Protestants, and Mormons—Romney portrayed himself as a moderate as recently as 2002, claiming in his run for Massachusetts governor that he "would protect the current pro-choice status quo" in the state because "women should be free to choose based on their own beliefs, not the government's."

But the Mitt Romney currently contemplating a run for the White House is a very different candidate. Seeking to serve as the standard-bearer for the religious right, he now staunchly opposes abortion and supports a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. He claims, in short, to be a man of deep piety who wishes to increase the role of conservative religion in the nation's public life. Far from soft-pedaling his faith, as he once did, he now embraces it as central to his political strategy.

A cynic would say that Romney has changed his positions in order to win the Republican nomination and that, in his heart, he's most likely a lukewarm believer in the doctrines of his church. In that case, non-Mormons may have nothing to fear from a Romney candidacy (though religious conservatives may have grounds for concern about how well he will represent their cause). But there is another possibility: Romney may have undergone an authentic religious rebirth during the last few years—a rebirth that has led him to embrace the fundamental tenets of his church more fully than ever before in his political career. If so, voters need to know it. And they need to think long and hard about the possible consequences of making such a man the president of the United States. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

A Trouble, a Trifle

NELSON MANDELA, WE are told, wrote to Edward Zwick, the director of **BLOOD DIAMOND**, saying that "it would be deeply regrettable if the making of the film inadvertently obscured the truth, and, as a result, led the world to cease buying mined diamonds from Africa." Zwick's film, to this viewer, does indeed obscure the truth, but not as Mandela feared. The subject is the role of diamonds in the Sierra Leone civil war in the 1990s, and it is not easy to determine from the film who is fighting whom for what. Whether diamond sales will be affected by this picture I doubt. Truths about the production of a hundred popular items do not affect sales. Did *Black Gold*, the documentary about the coffee market, affect Starbucks?

BLOOD DIAMOND
(Warner Bros.)

THE HOLIDAY
(Columbia)

But I have rarely seen a film as linked to history as *Blood Diamond* is, where it would be more helpful to know something about that history beforehand. The basic facts, not crystalline in the film, were recently given by Isaac Chotiner in these pages (see "Half Nelson," December 18): during the brutal civil war in Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002, the Revolutionary United Front forced civilians to work in diamond mines, then found ways to smuggle the gems to Europe and America, where they were bought with money that made its way back to the rebels. To dramatize this situation, Zwick's screenwriter, Charles Leavitt, plopped in three leading characters so stereotypical that they almost make the novel context seem old hat. First, there is the free-swinging, easy-living soldier of fortune—no, not Clark Gable anymore; this time it's Leonardo DiCaprio with a South African accent. Then there is an African, played by Djimon Hounsou, who is quite predictably noble. Third, there is the essential attractive woman, not likely to be present in reality, but reality bows to the box office. In the different setting of *The Departed*, Martin Scorsese made this female decoration a shrink attached to the Boston police department. Here in Sierra Leone, as played by Jennifer Connelly, she is a journalist for an American newsweekly who moves through the film's roiling risks as if they were ruffles on Madison Avenue.

The plot centers on Hounsou's recovery of a pink diamond that he hid when he was a forced miner. The maneuvers that lead to the stone's recovery and to the liberations that it will provide would hardly have passed muster for a stock Western in the heyday of stock Westerns. To make the conventions even more patent, Zwick throws in splotches of savage action so programmatically that after a while, when action starts, we almost hear ourselves saying, "Uh-huh." As for credibility, we all know that the leading man is not going to be killed early or midway in a feature, but Zwick leans a bit heavily on this convention.

The one attraction in the picture is DiCaprio's performance: easy yet strong, confident, humorous. Hounsou, who was statuesque in *Amistad*, is called upon here to provide more of the same. Connelly, poor woman, seems to admit defeat before she begins. The real worry in the film is Zwick.

Early in his career he made *Glory*, which is an imperfect but beautiful work that will last. It was hardly small-scale—it dealt with the Civil War—but its basic theme was somehow lyrical, plaintive, sustained. Since then, in *The Siege* and now in *Blood Diamond*, Zwick has moved into conventional "big" pictures—not devoid of themes, but not completely wedded to them. Both these films required a great deal of action—gun play, explosions, and so on. In *Blood Diamond* those sequences are messily edited—simply a lot of action stuff piled in for the needed number of minutes. Zwick's basic trouble, we feel, is that his feeling about violence is just the normal loathing of it. This is not quite sufficient for a film director, who must long to use violence cinematically, as did Ford or Peckinpah. The violent sequences are nasty moments that Zwick had to include because they were essential, but they are not components of his aesthetics.

Meanwhile we can hope for the return of the *Glory* Zwick, committed to a theme but not to studio rule-books.

Anyone interested in acting can find a fascinating comparison in **THE HOLIDAY**. The candy-store plot is about two young women, one in London and the other in Los Angeles, who have trouble with their men, want breaks from their lives, and, via computer, arrange to exchange houses for the Christmas holidays. Of course each of them finds a new romance in the new place. Much more engaging than the confectionery story are the contrasting two performances.

Cameron Diaz, truly beautiful, plays the American and, in the farcical and distraught moments that follow, uses everything that she has seen in films or has been taught by a director as mechanisms of response. Diaz is a former model who was pressed into film service—into stardom, in fact—because of her looks and personality, most cleverly used in *There's Something About Mary*. In *The Holiday* nothing comes from Diaz herself: she doesn't even seem to realize the need for it. As smoothly as she can, she runs past us the whole catalogue of expressions and intonations that are familiar from performers in variations of this role. Sometimes we almost see her trying to remember what she is supposed to do next.

The other woman is played by Kate Winslet, who comes from a theatrical family, appeared often in the English theater as a youngster, and already has among her film accomplishments Ophelia in Branagh's *Hamlet*, Marianne Dash-

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wood in *Sense and Sensibility*, and the young Iris Murdoch in *Iris*, as well as lovely appearances in many lesser roles. Winslet apparently had two chief thoughts about her role in *The Holiday*. One was a dread of doing anything that the audience might expect of her; the other was to find, in this malnourished screenplay, a real woman to embody.

Compare the sequences in which each of these women arrives at a house that she has never seen before. In the charming English cottage where she is to stay, Diaz's character is happily yet predictably surprised in the way that any of us might be: we wish we were in her shoes. When Winslet arrives at her half of the exchange, a luxe ultra-mod L.A. house with a swimming pool, we feel what *she* is feeling, which is more extended and more characterized than what we would feel. Winslet is an actress, Diaz is not.

The screenplay by Nancy Meyers, who directed, has dialogue that is not near the snap level of, say, Nicole Holofcener's comparable *Friends With Money*. And the geographical dilemma that inevitably arrives for these women—the murky future of a new love affair after each woman goes home to the other side of a six-thousand-mile spread—is mentioned but then simply ignored in a fake feel-good ending. ■

Isaiah Berlin and David Ben-Gurion

Religion, Identity, and the State

An exchange.

In the fall of 1958, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion addressed a letter to Jewish scholars and thinkers in Israel and abroad in connection with the work of the Cabinet Committee for the Registration of Children of Mixed Marriages, seeking their opinions about the relationship of religion and nationalism in the formulation of Jewish identity. In the winter of 1959, Isaiah Berlin sent him a reply.

I.

To Isaiah Berlin

27 October 1958
Jerusalem

[Dear Professor Berlin,]

I am approaching you in consequence of the decision adopted by the Israel Government on 15 July 1958, according to which a Committee, consisting of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of the Interior, was appointed to examine the rules for the registration of the children of mixed marriages, both of whose parents wish to register their children as Jews. In this decision the Government instructed the Committee to consider "statements of opinion by Jewish scholars in Israel and abroad on this subject," and to formulate registration rules "in keeping with the accepted tradition among all circles of Jewry, orthodox and non-orthodox of all trends, and with the special conditions of Israel as a sovereign Jewish State in which freedom of conscience and religion is guaranteed, and as a centre for the ingathering of the exiles."

The Register of the Population has been in existence in Israel since 1949, and among the particulars which have to be recorded according to law are "Religion" and "Nationality." The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the execution of the Registration of the Population Law, and the registration officers are authorized by law to demand and receive from the residents liable for registration such documents and information as they require for the purpose of verifying the particulars before they are registered. Each resident receives an Identity Card according to the particulars recorded in the Register, and this serves him for various purposes. In time of emergency every male resident has been obligated by law to carry his Identity Card wherever he goes.

From time to time proposals have been made to abolish the Register or the registration of "Religion" or "Nationality" as part of the Register, but we have so far been unable to accept these proposals for security and other reasons, and shall be unable to do so in the near future. In the light of our special situation, when there is no practical possibility of a thorough and permanent control of the country's borders to prevent the entry of infiltrators from the hostile neighboring countries, who are a source of grave and constant danger to the peace of the country and its population, it is essential that a legal resident in Israel should be able to identify himself at all times by means of a document supplied by an official authority.

The laws of Israel forbid all discrimination between one person and another on account of differences in race, color, nationality, religion or sex, but Jews enjoy one special privilege alone by virtue of the Law of the Return. A non-Jew who wishes to immigrate to Israel must receive permission to do so and the State is empowered to withhold such permission. If he settles in the country, he may become a citizen of Israel only by naturalization, which he can request after two years' residence. A Jew, however, is entitled to settle in Israel according to the Law of the Return by virtue of the fact that he is a Jew (if he is not a habitual criminal who is liable to endanger the public welfare or suffering from a disease liable to endanger the public health), and as soon as he arrives in the country and expresses his desire to settle in it he becomes, automatically and immediately, an Israel citizen.

The establishment of the religion of Israel residents is also essential, for this reason: according to the existing laws of Israel, matters of marriage and divorce are under the authority of the religious courts—the Shar'ia Court for Muslims, the Religious Courts of the various Christian communities for Christians, and the Rabbinical Court for Jews; according to the existing laws, marriages and divorces are conducted in Israel only according to the religious laws and by

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religious ceremonies; and according to the existing laws, marriages and divorces of Jews are held in Israel only according to Jewish Religious Law.

The question has arisen of how to register under the heading of "Religion" and "Nationality" children born of mixed marriages, when the father is a Jew and the mother is not a Jewess and has not become converted, but both of them agree that the child should be registered as a Jew. The opinion has been expressed that since the Register is a civil one and does not serve for religious purposes (the religious authorities are not obliged to be satisfied with it or to rely upon it, and in general they are not prepared to do so), this registration should not be governed by purely religious criteria; others say that since "Religion" and "Nationality" are inseparable, and since religious allegiance is naturally a religious question, only religious criteria should be followed, both in registering religion and in registering nationality.

The Government has decided that the religion or nationality of an adult shall be registered as "Jewish" if he declare in good faith that he is Jew and does not belong to another religion. According to the Law of the Equality of Women in force in Israel, both parents are the guardians of their children; if one of them dies, the survivor is the guardian. Generally, therefore, the declaration of both parents is accepted in any case in which a declaration is required from a child who has not yet reached maturity. In regard to the question of the registration in the Register of Population of children born of mixed marriages, the following question has arisen, however: if the mother is non-Jewish and has not been converted, but both she and the father agree that the child shall be Jewish, should he be registered as Jewish on the basis of the expression of the desire of the parents and their declaration in good faith that the child does not belong to another religion, or is any further ceremony of any kind required, in addition to the agreement and the declaration of the parents, for the child to be registered as a Jew? On this question the cabinet Committee has to make its recommendations to the Government, after receiving expressions of opinion by Jewish scholars as above.

Four considerations should be taken into account for the understanding of the problem as a whole:

1. The principle of freedom of conscience and religion has been guaranteed in Israel, both in the Proclamation of Independence and in the Basic Principles of the Governments that have held office until now, which have included both "religious" and "secular" parties. All religious or anti-religious coercion is forbidden in Israel, and a Jew is entitled to be either religious or non-religious.

COURTESY R.B. KITAJ

R.B. KITAJ, *Isaiah Berlin*, 1991–1992

2. Israel serves in our time as a centre for the ingathering of the exiles. The immigrants come from East and West, from both progressive and backward countries, and the merging of the various communities and their integration into one nation is one of Israel's most vital and difficult tasks. Every effort must therefore be made to strengthen the factors that foster cooperation and unity, and to root out as far as possible everything that makes for separation and alienation.

3. The Jewish community in Israel does not resemble a Jewish community in the Diaspora. We in this country are not a minority subject to the pressure of a foreign culture, and there is no need here to fear the assimilation of Jews among non-Jews, which takes place in prosperous and free countries. On the contrary, here there are, to a slight extent, possibilities and tendencies making for the assimilation of non-Jews among the Jewish people, especially in the case of families coming from mixed marriages who settle in Israel.

4. On the other hand, the people of Israel do not regard themselves as a separate people from Diaspora Jewry; on the contrary, there is no Jewish community in the world that is inspired by such a profound consciousness of unity and identity with the Jews of the world as a whole as the Jewish community in Israel. It is by no accident that the Basic Principles of the Government lay it down that the Government shall take measures for "the intensification of Jewish consciousness among Israel youth, the deepening of their roots in the past of the Jewish people and its historic heritage, and the strengthening of their moral attachment to World Jewry, in the consciousness of the common destiny and the historic continuity that unites Jews the world over of all generations and countries."

In the light of all the above considerations, we shall be grateful if you will be good enough to give us your opinion on the course which we should pursue in the registration of the children of mixed marriages, both of whose parents—both the Jewish father and the non-Jewish mother—wish to register their children as Jews.

[Signed]

David Ben-Gurion

II.

To DAVID BEN-GURION

23 January 1959
Oxford

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

I must begin with a number of apologies. The first for delaying for so many weeks in answering your enquiry (which

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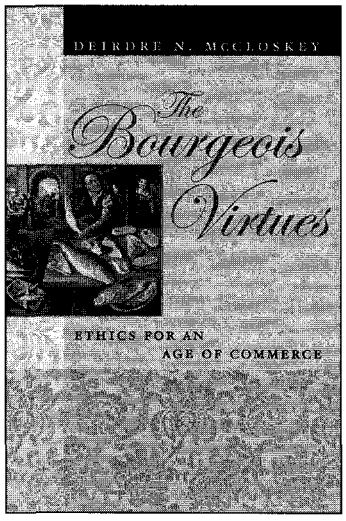
I received towards the end of last year, about a month after the letter was dated), with regard to the definition of Jews in Israel, and with special regard to the problem of the children of a certain type of mixed marriage. I must apologise also for not replying to you in Hebrew, a language which I love so much more deeply than I know it that it may be that I have not perfectly understood the sense of your letter, and for this too I must ask to be forgiven; and, finally, for the observations that I am about to make.

I was naturally greatly honoured by the fact that you should have considered me worthy of being consulted on a matter of such importance; and it is not only because of the intrinsic interest and urgency of the matter, but, far more, because of the deep respect (as you must know) and admiration which I feel towards yourself and the principles for which you stand, that I have done my best to produce an answer. At the same time I should not be wholly candid if I did not add that your letter placed me in a somewhat embarrassing, not to say false, position: for I do not believe that much good can be done by consulting anyone outside the frontiers of the State of Israel on a matter which is not only ultimately, but immediately, the administrative responsibility of the Israeli Government itself, and can be settled only by it and the Knesset. You speak, unanswerably, of the bonds that unite the Jews of Israel with the Jewish community in the rest of the world: nevertheless a minute examination of these bonds is bound to bring up issues concerning which there may be profound disagreement, not merely between Israel and the Diaspora, but within Israel itself, and the Diaspora itself. In so far as Israel is a sovereign State, founded to give full political and social expression to the Jewish nation, it must (and does), whenever critical issues present themselves, act on its own responsibility as a sovereign State, and on behalf of what it conceives to be the interests of the nation of which it is the political expression, without responsibility to, and without being obliged to seek the advice of, Jews beyond its borders. It cannot (and would not wish to) escape the judgement of public opinion among the Jews of the world, any more than a British Government could escape the judgement of many men of British race in other parts of the world. But it cannot be guided by such opinion directly. If, of course, the Jews are to be conceived as principally a *religious* establishment—a kind of Church—then nothing is more natural than to seek the expression of the views of the members of the Church before an important decision by the leaders of the Church is made. But I cannot believe that you hold this view. It appears to me, and I am sure you will agree, that the status of the Jews is unique and anomalous, composed of national, cultural, religious strands, inextricably intertwined. To attempt either to affirm their indissolubility, or to attempt the separation of these strands, must inevitably lead to much deep and bitter disagreement. It seems to me that unless and until it becomes imperative, as it may one day, to face Jews with so crucial an issue, little advantage is to be gained from doing so. It does not seem to me that the case concerning which you have formulated your enquiry is crucial in this extreme sense, and that therefore little good and perhaps some harm could result from forcing an alignment on it, i.e. by getting various individual Jews to state their cut-and-dried opinion on the subject, declare themselves, and fly a flag.



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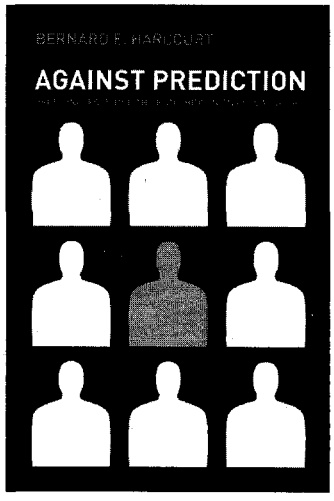

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If, of course, you think that a *Kulturkampf* is, in any case, inevitable, that the civil status of the State of Israel must be sharply and definitively divided from Judaism as an established religion (a point of view with which I have some sympathy), and that this is the moment to establish once and for all the principle that a modern liberal State is, and must be, secular in character, and that the religion of its citizens is, in so far as it is a State and nothing else, indifferent to it, then you may be right to issue such a questionnaire. I myself feel qualms before adding even my own minute drop of fuel to what is not yet a major conflagration. I was much tempted to follow the example of my illustrious friend Justice Felix Frankfurter, and refrain from giving a definite reply to your questions. But I have not his protection of judicial neutrality in political matters; and I therefore do append an answer (which does not satisfy me, but is the best that I can produce) because my regard for your person is greater than my wish to preserve myself from error by refusing to commit myself, where factors are so precariously balanced and in a field where I am (and am known to be) an ignoramus, and the issue so dubious. This is my only reason for sending a reply. I have shown it to Sir Leon Simon, and find that while I share some of his views, I do not share others. I am neither a rabbi, nor a lawyer, nor a specialist in Jewish history or sociology: my opinion is not, you must believe me, worth much: but I cannot bear to be so self-regarding or self-important as to decline to give it because it is not weighty enough, or may expose me to justified (or unjustified) criticisms.

I hope profoundly that it will not be necessary to advertise the results of this great enquiry in any way—not only that individual replies will be treated as confidential; but that when the Government finally acts it will do so without too much regard for, and too much open debate with, its outside advisers. I hope you will forgive me for all this gratuitous advice in your uniquely responsible and historic predicament. It is not meant to be officious or immodest.

I should like to say once more how deeply I appreciate the fact that you have done me the honour of asking for my views.

Yours sincerely,

Isaiah Berlin

Memorandum to the Prime Minister of Israel

1. I assume that the main problem before the State of Israel is of the attitude that it should take towards the children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers, where the mother has not been converted to Judaism, and both parents desire the child to be registered as a Jew in Israel. There is also the related question created by whether or not the religious authorities can accept as Jews persons who for their own reasons do not desire to belong to any religious denomination, or avail themselves of facilities provided by religious bodies. The two classes may of course overlap.

2. Should children of such mixed marriages be regarded and registered as Jews in Israel? Should persons who declare themselves atheists or belong to some religion other than Jewish, but who nevertheless claim to be Jews by nationality, be permitted to register as (say) atheists or Christians by religion, and Jews by nationality? What would this latter category connote, and what privileges and rights would it carry or forfeit?

3. In connection with this it seems to me not a merely academic fact that most words in common use are susceptible to at least two types of definitions: (*a*) a precise and clear but somewhat artificial definition necessitated by legal or theological or scientific requirements; and (*b*) the loose definition entailed by the use of words in everyday speech. The word "Jew" has, so far as I can tell, this narrower or tighter meaning as defined by Halacha—namely the son of a Jewess or a convert to Judaism—but equally it has a looser connotation in common speech. A Jew in this looser sense is anyone whom a normal person, acquainted with the customary use of the term, would, without too much reflection, describe as a Jew (just as a table is what most people agree to be a table, even though, e.g. for certain commercial or legal purposes, the meaning of the word "table" may have to be artificially tightened up). In this normal sense we can speak of "atheistic Jews" without any sense of contradiction; for we should make a man to be a Jew if he were in most respects identified with a Jewish community, despite the fact that his mother may be an unconverted non-Jewess, and that the rabbis may therefore quite correctly reject his claims to be a Jew in the religious—narrower—sense of the word.

4. The practice of the State of Israel, inasmuch as it involves the ascription to Jews of certain rights and duties which may not necessarily also be ascribed to non-Jews, creates the need for a legally precise definition of the term "Jew." How should it be defined?

5. It seems clear to me that, inasmuch as the State of Israel claims to be (as I think it does—and with justice) a liberal State and not a theocracy, it cannot define the status of its citizens or even of its residents in purely religious terms. If Israel is not to be a theocracy or impose religious tests of civil rights, it cannot withhold such rights as marriage, divorce, burial etc. from persons who proclaim themselves avowed atheists, or from those who do not profess a religion recognised as such by the State, simply on those grounds alone. If there is to be no religious coercion, as your letter so properly states, it must be possible for any resident of Israel to be married and divorced without recourse to a religious ceremony of any kind. If this is at present not politically feasible, owing to the strength of Israeli or Jewish opinion against it, this makes for some, if not a very high degree of, religious discrimination, and the problem of how to guarantee the civil liberties of the entire Israeli population, as civil freedom is understood in modern States today, seems to me, so long as this persists in principle, not soluble. This may, in view of the small number of persons affected by the absence of the civil institutions of marriage, divorce etc., not be an urgent problem at present. But the existence of this situation is nevertheless a blemish; and grave though the moral and spiritual problems its solutions may pose, nothing is gained by denying its existence.

6. If Israel is to be in the full sense a modern liberal State, the question of religious affiliation should make no difference to its laws of citizenship, or the civil and political rights enjoyed by its inhabitants. On the other hand, it is clear that there would have come into being no State of Israel if Judaism were merely a religion, and not, in some sense, a nationality as well. I assume that, for reasons of security, if none other, the inhabitants of Israel may at any rate for some time be required to register as either Jews or non-Jews of various categories. Should persons who are recognised (by members of their society, Jewish or non-Jewish) as Jews in the common sense of the word, but are not recognised as Jews

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by the rabbis interpreting the Halacha in the traditionally accepted manner, be regarded as politically and legally Jews or not? There can be no clear-cut or ready-made solution to this problem. If we are to rule out religious coercion even of the mildest kind—by the pressure of custom and public opinion—as being incompatible with the minimum requirements of individual liberty (and I cannot see how Israel can morally fail to do so—it was not denial of religious liberties that created Zionism), then there must exist a category of persons who will be entitled to register themselves as Jews by nationality, but not by religion. What criterion can be used in determining who these persons are? I must admit that the common-sense criterion, according to which anyone is a Jew who is taken to be a Jew, particularly by his Gentile neighbours in the countries of the Dispersion, seems to be near the mark, but somewhat fluid and vague. We can invent one, e.g. the criterion already proposed by some in Israel, including, I believe, yourself, of a declaration that one belongs to no other religion and therefore desires to be a Jew. Against that some may argue that this definition is too wide—it could include persons not normally thought of as Jews by anyone (say an ex-Nazi pagan)—and too narrow, for it should in principle be possible—however few persons will follow this in practice, or however anomalous this may seem—for a man to be nationally a Jew and by religion a Christian, a Muslim or whatever he pleases. To say that the national categories of Jew, Arab, Armenian etc. may be retained, but that, if a man is a Christian, he is automatically deprived of some political rights, does seem to me—even if it is politically unavoidable and demanded by Jewish public opinion—to be a form of religious discrimination. You may call this academic, since it is not, at present, an important practical issue, since the number of eccentrics who desire to live as Jews in Israel, and yet practice some non-Jewish religion, does not at present seem likely to become at all significant. Nevertheless, the issue of principle is there, and might one day (if, for example, Christian missions succeed in making converts) become important. Perhaps, therefore, the best solution to this problem, so long as the Law of Return operates, is to determine the nationality of such queer borderline cases (and it is only about them that this issue revolves) by means of ad hoc machinery: to establish a Commission, whether as part of an existing Ministry, or as a special institution consisting of qualified experts, to determine with regard to potential immigrants, and to those already resident in Israel, both children and adults, who should and who should not be qualified to register as (politically) a Jew. I should have thought that (*a*) someone who has lived the life of a Jew outside Israel, e.g. by being identified with the Jewish community in some clear sense, even though his mother may be a non-Jewess, would be cruelly punished if he were excluded from Jewish nationality—and not only from the Jewish religious community—on religious grounds. Such persons may of course choose to go through the rite of formal conversion (as, for example, I am told that the late Lord Melchett in England did), but even if they do not, to exclude them from the (politically) Jewish community unless they do so seems to me gratuitous and harsh; (*b*) similarly, children of mixed marriages whose Jewish fathers desire them to be brought up as Jews should in my view be allowed to be registered as Jews, in the expectation that the mere process of being brought up with other Jews in Israel will surely do its work of adequate assimilation.

7. Since the rabbinical authorities will of necessity, and quite properly, not regard such classes of persons as Jews, there will be a certain inevitable social pressure upon them, whatever steps may be taken to prevent this from becoming a form of coercion, to leap over the final fence which stands between them and full membership of the Jewish community everywhere, i.e. accept actual conversion to the Jewish religion. It may well be that most such persons will have little objection to accepting and practising the Jewish religion, at any rate the minimum required by Halacha. But some may choose not to do so, and they may, when they leave Israel, find themselves debarred from being accepted as members of Jewish communities in lands outside Israel. This is a necessary consequence of the structure of any organised religion, which rightly makes certain minimum demands of its members, and cannot relax them for political or legal or moral or any non-religious reasons. But the number of such persons is likely to be exceedingly small, nor, it seems to me, will the bonds which unite Israel to the Diaspora be likely to be snapped or even strained by the existence of such persons,

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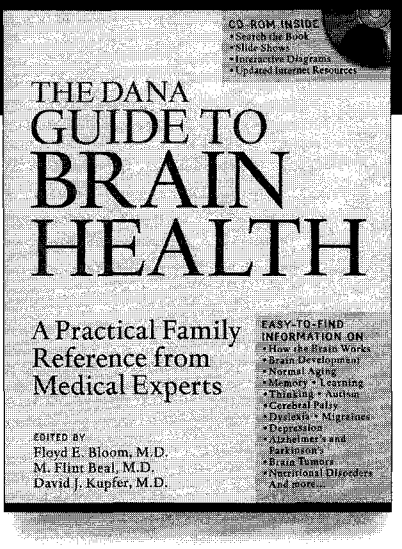

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and by their necessarily anomalous status. To repeat my earlier point again, I see no way of finally determining the status of these persons except by means of a Commission which judges each particular case, whether or not he or she satisfies a sufficient number of the clearly felt, but often indefinable, conditions of being a member of the (politically) Jewish community in Israel.

8. If it is felt that public opinion in Israel is not yet ripe for such a solution, and may indeed be outraged by it, that it may lead to a ferocious *Kulturkampf* within Israel, and indeed to a schism between Israel and the Jewish community beyond its borders, then, if it is desired to avoid an early head-on crash with painful consequences, I think that some kind of interim status could be created for these problematical cases. The children of unconverted non-Jewesses, the unconverted wives of Jews in Israel (who desire to play their full part in the Jewish community) and similar persons could be registered not as "Jews" politically, but as "of Jewish origin; father a Jew" or "wife of a Jew," "paternal grandfather and maternal grandfather Jews," or the like, simply recording the facts; and a special status would then have to be created for such cases in anticipation that this will itself lead to crystallisation of the issue, that the persons placed in this no man's land would either ultimately become assimilated wholly into the Jewish community, or drop out of it; or at worst continue indefinitely as borderline cases until such time as a more liberal legislation is politically feasible and they can be freely absorbed into the Jewish texture without too much protest by anyone. This is not a satisfactory solution but, in the circumstances assumed above, the most painless that I can think of. This situation must on no account be allowed to be more than temporary; nothing would be more iniquitous or ruinous than to permit the emergence of a permanent category of citizens of inferior status—half-Jews, with incomplete civil and political rights; an abominable inverted caricature of anti-Semitic persecution in other countries. If religious resistance to the free integration of such persons is really too slow to be overcome by the authority of the State at present, it would be better not to allow such persons to immigrate than to expose them to the horrors of minority status.

9. I must admit that I find it hard to believe that the acceptance into the Jewish community of persons who would normally be regarded as Jews (at any rate by those who, for whatever reasons, are interested in such matters—persons conscious of what it is to be a Jew), even if they do not fully qualify under the rules of rigorously applied Halacha, would cause a deep rift either within Israel or between Israel and the Jews of the outside world. But about this I may well be mistaken; on this issue I should not like to volunteer a view. Historically, the Jewish religion, the Jewish race, and all the factors which combine into Jewish culture, have combined into a single, persistent entity, incapable of being neatly fitted into the political pattern of a modern State of a Western type. The rise of the State of Israel can "normalise" the Jewish population only by allowing—not necessarily encouraging—each of these factors to pursue a separate career. This seems to be neither avoidable nor necessarily undesirable: one must hope that it will upset as few Jewish convictions and loyalties as possible; but I doubt whether it is realistic to hope that it will offend against none. I feel this the more strongly, since I am not happy about this "solution" myself.

Isaiah Berlin ■

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Emily Wilson
Passions and a Man

THE AENEID
Translated by Robert Fagles
With an Introduction
by Bernard Knox
(Viking, 486 pp., $40)

I.

VIRGIL WAS THE CLOSEST thing to the poet laureate of Augustan Rome. Augustus saw himself as the liberator of the Roman people, the man who had brought peace after years of civil war, and who controlled and expanded Rome's enormous empire. The new ruler was eager to find artists and poets to celebrate and to immortalize his achievements. But many of the most talented poets of the age—including Horace, Propertius, and Ovid—refused to write the grand political epic that Augustus hoped for. Only Virgil came close to giving the emperor what he wanted. The close association between the *Aeneid* and imperial power has made many readers uncomfortable with it—including, perhaps, Virgil himself.

The poet, who lived from 70 to 19 B.C.E., spent ten years on the *Aeneid*, and it was still unfinished at the time of his death. Legend has it that he ordered his executors to burn the work, although the emperor overrode his dying wishes. Perhaps—as Hermann Broch suggested in his diffuse, dream-like novel *The Death of Virgil*—the poet finally decided that he had gone too far in toadying up to the powers that were. The *Aeneid* has often been read as a conservative, pro-imperialist, triumphalist celebration of imperialism in general and of the emperor in particular.

It is certainly concerned with the historical power of Rome. Rome is not just any big city (as Troy, in the *Iliad*, could be any city under siege, or Ithaca, in the *Odyssey*, any homeland). Rome, for Virgil, is the culmination of history. The poem looks obliquely at the contemporary Rome of the poet's own day, from the perspective of the distant mythological past. But the *Aeneid* remains deeply rooted in the history of its time. Auden famously criticized Virgil for his craven attempt to make the particularities of his own time look like universal truth, and to make Augustan Rome seem the culmination of a progressive world history:

> No, Virgil, no:
> Behind your verse so masterfully
> made

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We hear the weeping of a Muse
betrayed.

But as even Auden acknowledges, the *Aeneid* includes the sound of weeping as well as the din of mastery and power.

One can argue that the high cost of empire increases its value: Virgil shows us how much Rome matters by showing us how much pain went into its building. Or one may feel that the heart of the poem lies in the grief of those who lose out to empire. It is ultimately impossible to decide whether Virgil was "for" or "against" Augustus, whether the poem is fundamentally "optimistic" or "pessimistic," whether it is history written for the winners or the losers. These dualisms become too crude to account for the complex texture of the poem, in which Virgil seems always to acknowledge a multilayered reality. Personal desires are always thwarted by the progress of history. The *Aeneid* is not merely a celebration of Roman power; it is also an analysis of the costs of empire, both to the conquered and the conquerors.

VIRGIL WAS BORN NOT IN Rome, but in Mantua, near Naples. As Bernard Knox emphasizes in his fine introduction to Robert Fagles's new translation, "Virgil was an Italian long before he became a Roman." He had seen at first hand the damage caused to rural Italians by the long period of civil war. In 42 B.C.E., when Virgil was in his twenties, many land-holdings in the Mantua area were confiscated to reward veteran soldiers after the battle of Philippi. Virgil's own father seems to have been exempt from the expropriation, perhaps through the direct intervention of Octavian (the man who later became Augustus). Virgil's first two works of poetry, the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*, both deal with life in the Italian countryside. Both those works, like the *Aeneid* itself, present Italy as a place of struggle, where farmers can be evicted from their lands by armies, storms, economic hardship, or foreign invasion.

Virgil returns, in the *Aeneid*, to the theme of the last book of the *Georgics*: the contrast between, on the one hand, love, beauty, art, and personal happiness; and, on the other hand, society, order, military success, and self-control. In order to become the founder of Rome, Aeneas must lose almost everything that is of personal value to him. He loses his home, his wife, his father, his lover Dido, the Trojan name of his people, his foster son Pallas—even, perhaps, his own moral standards, his identity as the "good guy," and his capacity for pity and human sympathy.

T. S. Eliot claimed that the *Aeneid* is the ultimate "classic": "our classic, the classic of all Europe." It is probably the single text from classical antiquity that has had the longest continuous influence over the later Western tradition. Virgil was more readily assimilated into a Christian school syllabus than the racier classical poets, and he continued to be read throughout the Middle Ages. There was an ancient tradition of misreading Virgil's Fourth Eclogue as a prophecy about the birth of Jesus. The poet, whose real name was Publius Vergilius Maro, was dubbed "Virgil" because his magic wand (*virga*) can guide even a Christian reader closer to the truth about God, as in Dante's *Inferno*. The *sortes Virgilianae* have always been one of the most helpful magical ways to make a decision or to predict the future, and much cheaper than psychic hotlines: just pick a line from Virgil at random and all your questions will be answered.

Yet the central position of the *Aeneid* in the Western canon is not entirely explicable by the supposedly magical or proto-Christian powers of its author. This poem has continued to be read and re-read for two thousand years because it has never lost its relevance. Almost every country in Europe has seen itself at some point as the new Troy, and hence as the new Rome. The *Aeneid* is not only a survivor from classical antiquity, but also a poem that is explicitly concerned with the problem of how a lost ancient civilization can be perpetuated in the modern world. Perhaps the lost city of Troy can be rebuilt again, as the newly flourishing world power of Rome, or Constantinople, or Paris, or London, or Washington. Or perhaps we can create a new and peaceful society only by forgetting our history: as Juno says in the twelfth book of the poem: "Troy has fallen—and fallen let her stay!"

IN OUR DAY, HOWEVER, FOR ALMOST the first time since its composition, the *Aeneid* has slipped from its place as the central text in Western educational systems. In 106, 1406, 1706, or 1906, it would have been unimaginable that somebody could be considered fully educated and not have read a word

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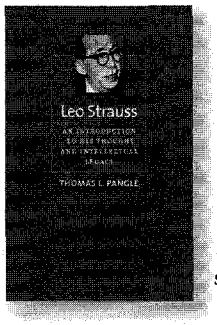

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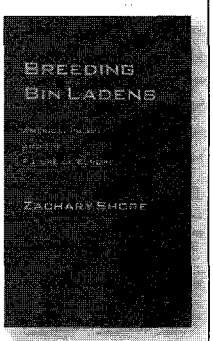

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of the *Aeneid* in the original Latin. This is no longer the case; I imagine that a large number of the intellectual readers of this magazine have never learned any Latin. Perhaps for this very reason, there has never been a more interesting time to read the *Aeneid*. If you have not been forced through Latin grammar in your earliest youth, and if you do not harbor the presupposition that the *Aeneid* is a poem of the conservative establishment, then you are in an excellent position to see the contemporary relevance of Virgil, particularly for Americans.

It is a poem about the formation of a vast imperial power, and the human cost of that process. The second half of the *Aeneid*, in which the Trojans fight against the Rutulians—a group of native inhabitants—has clear resonance with the beginnings of American colonial history, and even with the current war in Iraq. Aeneas has no difficulty establishing an initial stronghold in Italy; the difficult thing is to pacify the natives and to win the peace. Virgil's analysis of the formation of a multicultural society—composed of Latins, Rutulians, and Trojans, all mixed together and speaking the same language, forgetful of their historical differences—is an obvious prototype for modern America. Aeneas's difficulties are those that face anybody trying to create a multi-ethnic, racially mixed society: what to do about minorities; how to integrate different histories and different cultural traditions; how to maintain order and avert civil war, but without suspending the rule of law or violating citizens' rights. How can we guarantee that force is used properly? At what point should we say "no mercy" and give up *habeas corpus*? The poem shows us what a thin line there may be between mastery and brutality. It shows, too, how a dominant world power may take on the rhetoric of the underdog: the triumphant Romans present themselves as poor, defeated Trojans. All wars are fought for redemption and retaliation and preemptive self-defense, never in outright aggression.

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II.

Different translators will give the Latin-less reader very different images of Virgil's poem. The most commonly read verse translations, before Fagles, are those by Allen Mandelbaum (1971), Robert Fitzgerald (1981), and Stanley Lombardo (2005). Mandelbaum's *Aeneid* has an otherworldly, fluid rhythm, and uses a pentameter inflected by Dante's *terza rima*. Composed during the Vietnam War, this version of the poem makes particularly clear the personal voice of loss, within the grand imperial quest. Fitzgerald's *Aeneid* is much grander, more obviously "epic," more focused on the Roman achievement than on its cost. Echoing the density of Virgil's language, Fitzgerald's English is deliberately slow, stiff, and often slightly archaic. Lombardo's *Aeneid* is a completely different poem again: a fast-moving, exciting adventure story, about a man who achieves his goal despite many obstacles.

Robert Fagles's *Aeneid* is, I think, the best translation of our age. It is lively and colloquial, though it uses a somewhat slower pace than Lombardo. This is an advantage. Fagles allows us to pause before rushing on to the next event. There are some wonderfully vivid descriptions. Here is the simile comparing the Golden Bow to an evergreen plant:

> As mistletoe in the dead of winter's
> icy forests
> leafs with life on a tree that never
> gave it birth,
> embracing the smooth trunk with
> its pale yellow bloom,
> so glowed the golden foliage against
> the ilex evergreen.

Fagles makes beautiful use of alliteration and assonance for this strange, mystical moment. He is equally good at the gory bits. Here is Camilla, the Amazon warrior princess, chopping up a Trojan on the battlefield:

> her battle-ax smashes down,
> blow after blow through armor,
> bone, splitting his skull,
> warm brains from the wound go
> splashing down his face.

One of the hardest tasks facing any modern translator of the *Aeneid* is how to make Virgil sound suitably dignified. Virgil did not write in street Latin. He observes careful decorum—far more so than Homer. At the funeral games in the *Iliad*, Ajax slips in horse manure. There is no manure in Virgil. He chooses the more dignified register over the more colloquial. Thus, the colloquial Latin word for kiss was *basium* (as in Catullus, *da mi basia mille*, "give me a thousand kisses"); but Virgil invariably uses the more elevated literary word, *osculum*.

The danger, for a contemporary English translator who hopes to echo Virgil's language, is that a would-be elevated, epic tone will sound stilted, pompous, and unreadable—or just silly. Dryden, whose 1697 version of the *Aeneid* remains one of the most powerful English translations, was at an advantage, because English heroic poetry was a living possibility at that period: *Paradise Lost* had been published only a few decades earlier. But a modern translator has no contemporary tradition of English epic to draw on.

In general, Fagles is extremely successful at creating a voice that sounds like modern English but maintains a reasonably dignified register. He uses a relatively long, roughly six-beat line, which has a number of advantages over the more common iambic pentameter. It is closer to Virgil's dactylic hexameter, and it allows Fagles to create more movement within his line and to use more effective enjambment. By contrast, Lombardo's short, snappy tetrameters feel to me a little too end-stopped, a little too abrupt. Consider the famous first lines of the poem: *Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris*. . . . Here is Lombardo:

> Arms I sing—and a man,
> The first to come from the shores
> Of Troy, exiled by Fate, to Italy
> and the Lavinian coast. . . .

Lombardo here takes two and a half lines to cover the material that Virgil packs into his first line. Fagles, by contrast, manages to retain some of the complexity and weight of Virgil's narrative voice, but without sacrificing readability.

> Wars and a man I sing—an exile
> driven on by Fate,
> he was the first to flee the coast
> of Troy,
> destined to reach Lavinian shores
> and Italian soil. . . .

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Fagles takes us—as Virgil does—*in medias res*, "into the middle of the action," in the very first line.

IT IS PROBABLY IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND a precise modern English equivalent to the extraordinarily dense music of Virgil's hexameter, which is both highly regular and highly varied. We have become used to the idea that the English "equivalent" to the classical hexameter—and especially to the Virgilian hexameter—is iambic pentameter. One of the first attempts to translate Virgil into English verse was by Robert Surrey, who published his Book Four in 1554 and Book Two in 1557. Surrey's translations of the *Aeneid* were the first-ever instances of English unrhymed iambic pentameter. Fairly few verse translators of Virgil since Surrey have tried anything other than iambic pentameter. Lombardo uses a kind of tetrameter; L. R. Lind in 1962 and Edward McCrorie in 1995 experimented with dactylic pentameter; James Mantinband tried hexameter in 1964, not very successfully. But until now the mainstream had been represented by Mandelbaum and Fitzgerald, who work in unrhymed pentameter.

Fagles shows authoritatively that a flexible, mostly six-beat line can work beautifully as an English version of the classical hexameter. He uses roughly six main stresses, occasionally five, occasionally seven. The basic technique was pioneered by Richmond Lattimore in his translations of Homer, but Fagles's version is more varied, more delicately modulated. His *Aeneid* feels much less compressed than the original, and it is not a line-for-line translation. Yet Fagles's looser, longer line allows him to pack in more information, and in this way to come closer to the plenitude of Virgil's language.

Ezra Pound's favorite version of the *Aeneid* was by the medieval Scottish poet Gavin Douglas (finished in 1513, published posthumously in 1553). Pound claimed that Douglas had improved on the original, because Douglas, unlike Virgil, had heard the sea. By this criterion, Fagles's *Aeneid* is certainly the best version since Douglas. Fagles has a marvelous sense for the rollicking rhythms of sea voyages: the pleasures of reading the early books of this *Aeneid* match those of reading Conrad, or Patrick O'Brian. Here is a characteristically vigorous passage, where Aeneas's fleet runs into a storm off the coast of Sicily:

They snapped to commands,
pulled hard, Palinurus first
to swerve his shuddering prow
to port for open sea
and the whole fleet swung to port
with oars and sails.
Up to the sky an immense billow
hoists us, then at once
as the wave sank down, down
we plunge to the pit of hell.

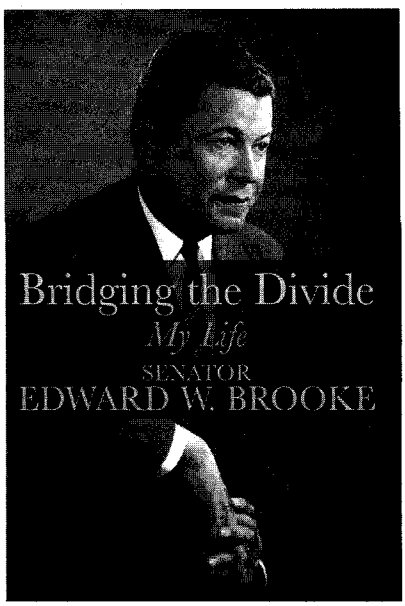
I don't know if Fagles is a sailor, but he writes like a man who knows the sound and the rhythm of the sea, as well as the meaning of words such as "welter," "yawing," "cables," "squalls," and "killer-breakers."

Fagles's tone is not entirely consistent. Every so often I was bothered by modern proverbs bordering on cliché—as when Aeneas is stuck "between the devil and the deep blue sea." Sometimes the diction is not quite appropriate to the situation, and there are a few unfortunate comic lapses: Aeneas at his most brutal, triumphing over one of his slaughtered enemies, is made to sound like a hoity-toity Mitford sister: "Now lie there, you great, frightful man!" But more often Fagles's use of colloquialism brings to life even the most familiar lines of Virgil. At the triumphal moment in Book Nine, when Apollo calls down from the sky to praise Iulus (Aeneas's son, and the forefather of Julius Caesar), Fagles achieves just the right tone of schoolmasterly enthusiasm: "Bravo, my boy, bravo," says the god. "That's the path to the stars."

Fagles's sensitivity to Virgil's metaphors is especially impressive. When Dido "feeds" or "nourishes" (*alit*) the wound of her love for Aeneas, Fagles not only notices the metaphor, but hints at its implications: "hour by hour nursing the wound with her lifeblood." It is as if the love that Dido feels for Aeneas is itself their baby, the fictional baby they never actually have. She nurses her own desire and destruction as if it were a child.

III.

YET FAGLES'S MOST IMPRESSIVE achievement is that he is sensitive to a far wider range of voices and points of view than any previous translator known to me. Fagles shows us, much more clearly than Mandelbaum, Fitzgerald, or Lombardo, that each of the characters in the poem has his or her own different per-



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spective on the story. He shows, too, that this is an enormously emotional poem, which is intensely concerned with the fulfillment and the control of emotions. Most translators are better on one side of the emotional spectrum than another: sorrow or anger, not both. But Fagles renders brilliantly the bitter rage of Juno against the Trojans and the bewilderment of Aeneas as his city is burnt, and also the passionate grief of Dido abandoned by Aeneas, the intense desire of Nisus to die for the sake of the boy he loves, the distinct battle-rages of Mezentius, Camilla, and Aeneas himself—all with an unmatched vividness.

The *Aeneid* is a highly literary, highly written work—but it is written from, and about, the heart. Virgil is far more interested than Homer was in analyzing the internal states, the conflicting emotions, of his characters. Thus the poem traces a connection, through the imagery of fire, from the burning passion of Juno, to the burning of Troy, to the burning heart of Dido, to the flames that mark the house of Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus, the burning ships of the Battle of Actium, and the burning anger of Aeneas as he kills Turnus. Emotions become the key to history. Fagles, more than any other translator, shows that the *Aeneid* is a poem of passion.

Fagles comes to the *Aeneid* after producing highly successful versions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. I admire Fagles's Homer enormously, but I agree somewhat with those who feel that Fagles has a tendency to make his narrative too emotional, too pointed. He is not very successful at conveying the Homeric sense that, whatever happens, the world goes on the same. He leaves out a lot of the repeated epithets (such as "swift-footed Achilles"), or else tries to make them relevant to the particular narrative moment in which they appear. He adds moody parentheses and pauses, which sometimes make the verse seem a little stagey. Fagles's Homer feels like a text written for reading aloud, not like the transcription of an oral epic. (Perhaps for this reason, it makes an excellent audiobook. You can get a boxed set of the Fagles *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together, read by Ian McKellen and Derek Jacobi. The new *Aeneid* has been recorded by Simon Callow.)

The *Aeneid* suits Fagles's pointed narrative style better than the Homeric poems. Virgil nods to Homer by pretending to "sing," like an oral poet, but his work is self-consciously literary, designed for reading aloud or private reading. Just as bear cubs (according to a rather sweet ancient misapprehension) are born unformed and must be licked into shape by their mother, so Virgil said he "licked" his manuscript into its proper form, working at a rate of about three lines a day. Fagles reminds us of Virgil's careful art. He recognizes that Virgil is the most thoughtful of poets, not only as a writer of lines but also as a writer of people, feelings, and visions of the world.

Mikhail Bakhtin once drew a sharp contrast between epic and history, which supposedly employ a single "objective" point of view, and the novel, which is "polyglossic," using many voices and multiple points of view. Like all such charming generalizations, Bakhtin's rule does not really work: the *Aeneid* is, by these criteria, a novel, not an epic. Fagles's knowledge of nineteenth-century novels certainly helps him to read Virgil. He shows us that the *Aeneid* is in many ways comparable to *Anna Karenina* or *War and Peace*. Like Tolstoy, Virgil sets passionate sexual longing against duty and self-control.

Virgil makes extensive use of limited points of view; of metaphors and similes that may reflect either reality or only a part of it. He even uses that typically novelistic technique, "free indirect discourse." In the *Aeneid*, we are often aware that we may be seeing only what one character sees—not the whole world, as if from a god's-eye vision; or that an objective view is not available to those within the story. We are told, for instance, what is depicted on the Shield of Aeneas—the whole future history of the Roman race; but we are also reminded that our position as readers is very different from that of Aeneas. He has no idea what the future means: "He knows nothing of these events." The limitations of any single person's knowledge is one of the great themes of the poem. There is no such thing as a total vision; there are only partial glimpses, which may be delusions—as when Aeneas thinks he sees his lost beloved Dido in the underworld: "as one / when the month is young may see or seem to see / the new moon rising up through banks of clouds."

Fagles insists that impressions and value judgments may be entirely subjective. A striking example is his version of the story of Dido. You will remember that Dido is inspired by Juno to fall in love with the Trojan stranger when he is shipwrecked on her shores. In the middle of a thunderstorm, Aeneas and Dido take shelter together in a cave. Juno, goddess of marriage, sends a sudden display of lightning, which seems—but perhaps only to poor deluded Dido—to legitimate the beginning of their sexual relationship. At this moment, Virgil tells us, *coniugium vocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam*. Dryden translates this line to read that Dido "called it 'marriage,' by that specious name / To veil the crime and sanctify the shame." Fitzgerald is less obviously censorious, but he still insists that Dido was to blame: she "called it marriage. Thus, under that name, / She hid her fault." Despite the grief that all readers cannot but feel for Dido's death, the perception of this character as a fallen woman, whose death is caused by the crime, fault or sin of sexual immorality, has haunted almost every translation of the poem into English. To find more sympathy for Dido, we have to look back as far as Chaucer, who condemns Aeneas's treachery for the poor queen's death.

But Fagles restores Dido's honor without damning Aeneas, by suggesting that what Dido lost in that cave was not her respectability but her self-respect. His Dido

> no longer thinks to keep the
> affair a secret,
> no, she calls it a marriage,
> using the word to cloak her sense
> of guilt.

This Dido is not a dishonored woman. She is a woman who has lost her sense of her own worth—an importantly different thing. The interpretation of *culpam* ("fault" or "guilt") as Dido's perception, not the narrator's objective judgment, is

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a compelling one, which makes sense of the narrative much better than the fallen-woman story. The narrator insists that Dido is *infelix*, "unhappy"—or as Fagles renders the word, "tragic." Fagles brilliantly shows us a Dido whose tragedy—like the tragedy of Anna Karenina or Madame Bovary—is largely a product of her own solitary imagination, as in this marvelous passage:

> She always feels alone,
> abandoned, always wandering down
> some endless road,
> not a friend in sight....

FAGLES EMPHASIZES THE SUBJECTivity of other characters' moral judgments, too. Aeneas's central characteristic, his *pietas*—duty, filial piety, holiness, morality—is sometimes rendered by Fagles as his "sense of devotion"; Aeneas's son Ascanius benefits not from his objectively good behavior (*mores*), but from his "sense of worth." Turnus is spurred on not by his "courage inwardly known" (Fitzgerald's translation of *conscia virtus*), but by his "sense of his own worth." Indeed, the phrase "sense of..." threatens to become a tic in the translation.

This extraordinary sensitivity to Virgil's multiple points of view allows Fagles to treat Aeneas, as well as Dido, with more sympathy than most translators can muster. It is a difficult task to bring to life the stiff, passive, sometimes cipher-like hero of the early books of the *Aeneid*. But Fagles picks up on details that evince Aeneas's humanity, even at his most block-like. When Dido has sent her sister to make her last passionate appeal to her lover to stay—even if only for a little while, even if he must abandon her in the end—we are told that Aeneas made no reply at all, and was deaf to Dido's pleas. Dryden makes Aeneas unable even to hear what she is feeling: "Fate, and the god, had stopped his ears to love." Fitzgerald's Virgil comments that "God's will blocked the man's once kindly ears." But both these translations simplify the complex emotional situation that Virgil evokes. The Latin, on the face of it, suggests that Aeneas's ears are still "kindly" (*placidas*) even when he is refusing to give Dido what she so desperately wants. Fagles credits Aeneas with sympathy at the very moment when he refuses Dido's appeals: "and heaven blocks his gentle, human ears." This translation manages to present Aeneas as a person who has both strength and genuine emotional depths. He is a hero, but more than that, he is a human being, who struggles to remain true to his conviction and his obligation. In reading Fagles, far more than most translators, I believed in Aeneas as a man whose sense of obligation is constantly threatened, and finally overwhelmed, by emotion.

At this moment in American history, we are all conscious that imperialism has a price. President Bush, who was certainly speaking without Virgil in mind, recently declared that "the road to victory will not be easy. We should not expect a simple solution. The fact that the fighting is tough does not mean our efforts in Iraq are not worth it." Such a rhetoric of cost and complexity is strongly reminiscent of Virgil's analysis of empire. As the narrator exclaims at the beginning of the poem: *tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem*, "Such a long hard labor it was to found the Roman people."

But Virgil's narrative, unlike that of the president, acknowledges that the perspective of the powerful is not the only one available. Aeneas's dead father, Anchises, tells him in the Underworld that a Roman leader must use the perfect combination of violence and mercy. You must "rule with all your power," but also

> Put your stamp on the works and
> ways of peace,
> to spare the defeated, break the
> proud in war.

Fagles is characteristically sensitive to the complexity of this famous injunction, reminding us that the militaristic Roman "stamp" (*mos*—custom, culture, ideology) may be difficult to combine with the "works and ways of peace." Contrast Dryden, who suggests that the powerful can do no wrong: "disposing peace and war thy own majestic way"; or Fitzgerald, who assumes that imperialism brings order to anarchic native societies: "to pacify, to impose the rule of law."

In the final lines of the poem, Aeneas the pious, the dutiful and the devoted, becomes inflamed with passionate rage against his enemy Turnus. He rejects Turnus's appeal for mercy, remembering only that this man killed his friend. In his anger, Aeneas seems to

UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY
Fifty Years Since Roth v. United States

The National Tragedy of the Supreme Court's Misjudgment on Obscenity

by Daniel Mark Cohen

"[W]ithout virtue, there can be no political liberty . . ." -John Adams

The year 2007 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Roth v. United States*, the landmark case in which America's highest judicial body determined that "obscenity" is not protected by the Constitution, but that nothing is obscene unless a proxy representative of the community is moved to deem it so. Even more striking, as a necessary, underlying premise to the opinion, the Court tacitly endorsed an astounding proposition: that photographs of women engaged in acts of prostitution, absent fulfillment of an elusive legal standard, constitute a form of *speech* entitled to protection by the First Amendment.

It is only now, fifty years later, with the astonishing invention of the Internet, the universal establishment of the personal computer, and daily, unimpeded access to the Internet by America's children, that one can begin to glimpse the apocalyptic consequences of the Supreme Court's woeful and spectacular misjudgment in *Roth*. The Supreme Court's ruling in 1957, and the legal progeny wrought therefrom, has precipitated a national spiritual decline in this country, subtle in form and glacial in pace to be sure, but inexorable, and one that, undiscerned, threatens to bring about the collapse of these, the former United Colonies, now the United States. . . .

"Can it be, that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a Nation with its virtue?" -George Washington

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forget that being Roman was supposed to include sparing the defeated along with breaking the proud. Or perhaps it is sometimes impossible, in the real world of the living, to distinguish one from the other. Aeneas founds the city of Rome by burying his sword in his enemy's body: the Latin verb *condidit* (in Fagles, "plants") means both to "found" and to "bury." "Blazing with wrath, he plants / his iron sword hilt-deep in his enemy's heart."

This is perhaps the most disturbing ending of any great epic poem. You could say, with Bush, that Aeneas is simply adapting to the danger posed by Turnus, just as the president's administration is "taking new steps to help secure Baghdad, and constantly adjusting our tactics across the country to meet the changing threat." Perhaps it takes a lot more force than one might have hoped to put a Roman stamp on the "works and ways of peace." But from the perspective of Turnus, Aeneas has committed an "outrage": he has refused an appeal to "go no further down the path of hatred." For Virgil, the critique of empire offered by history's losers cannot be fully incorporated within one dominant, single-voiced discourse. The *Aeneid* is a poem that glorifies an invasive imperialist war. But it is also a poem that insists that the victors are not the only people who have a valid vision of the world. It recognizes, too, that the resort to arms can sometimes get out of anybody's control, that the cost of victory can be too high, and that the stubborn voice of passion may impede the path to peace. ■

Eric Arnesen
In-Between People

ISRAEL ON THE APPOMATTOX: A SOUTHERN EXPERIMENT IN BLACK FREEDOM FROM THE 1790S THROUGH THE CIVIL WAR
By Melvin Patrick Ely
(Alfred A. Knopf, 640 pp., $35)

THE STUDY OF AMERICAN slavery has come a long way since the grand, sweeping histories of the 1970s. Whereas once historians took the entire South as their subject and painted the contours of the slave and master class experience (note the singular, not plural, of "experience") with the broadest of brushstrokes, in more recent years scholars have tended to focus less on "slavery" or "the slave experience" than on particular aspects of the institution of human bondage. We now have before us a wealth of scholarship that attends, often skillfully, to regional differences, chronological variation, the labor-requirement specificities of various agricultural crops and trades, and even the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of individual groups of Africans in America.

To a large extent, slavery studies have caught up with the rest of the social history of the downtrodden, which has long generated a host of micro-studies of their particular subjects (Irish immigrants in Boston, artisans in Baltimore, women in western mining camps, Chinese laundry workers in San Francisco and New York). In place of far-reaching tomes on the slave system, there is now a steady stream of fine scholarly work on manumission, marriage, childrearing and childhood under slavery, the dynamics of the internal (interstate) slave trade, runaway slaves, slave hiring, slave medicine and midwifery, gender, space and bodies, and the self-education of slaves. The notion of "the slave experience" has hardly been put out of business: history textbooks, PBS documentaries, and the occasional over-generalizing synthesis have kept it alive for its narrative convenience and its metaphorical power. But to the credit of the field, slavery scholars have contributed their distinctive patches to the richly colored historiographical quilt.

What unites many of these works are the shared political sensibilities of the authors. Chattel slavery finds no defenders or apologists, as it did before the 1960s. (It is difficult to imagine today just how profoundly the subjects of slavery, the Civil War, and emancipation have been revolutionized, and how thoroughly earlier scholarly interpretations of these topics have been discredited.) Since that time, slavery historians, like so many of their counterparts in labor history, women's history, and African American history more broadly, distinguish themselves by their pronounced moralism and their condemnation of the systems of oppression that dehumanized and exploited their subjects.

And they go further: like social historians of other subaltern groups, they have embraced their subjects with gusto, investing them with tremendous creativity, energy, autonomy, and—this is the critical term—agency. Resistance, it now seems, was not futile; ubiquitous, it allowed an enslaved people to maintain a measure of cultural and familial autonomy that, while never complete, enabled them to survive the brutalities of the system that deprived them of their freedom. "Slave resistance was a fact of life" generated not by academics' discourse but by "the slavery experience itself," one young scholar recently argued with a touch of defensiveness. Not only was slave resistance "forged in the conditions of enslavement," it also constituted an intrinsic part of a "long-term freedom struggle" that carries on, presumably, to this day.

MELVIN PATRICK ELY'S BOOK strikes a decidedly distinct historiographical tone. Taking as its subject a single small community of free African Americans called Israel Hill, located in Prince Edward Country in southwestern Virginia in the first half or so of the nineteenth century, it self-consciously resists the all-too-prevalent temptation to reduce its subject to a morality tale of black resistance to slavery's near-totalizing evils. It does not elevate the black men and women populating its pages to the status of heroes and heroines; nor does it assign to them some larger-than-life agency that altered slavery's contours. Deeply respectful of his subjects, Ely takes pains to portray both blacks and whites in Prince Edward County as fully human, warts and all. The result is a book that asks us to think again about the meanings of freedom and slavery, and about the way we write their history.

The free black community of Israel

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Hill had its origins in the political outlook—and the guilty conscience—of Richard Randolph, a member of a prosperous and prominent extended slaveholding clan whose members included his stepfather St. Tucker George and his cousin Thomas Jefferson. Coming of age shortly after the American Revolution, the young Randolph imbibed the ideas of the Enlightenment and the anti-slavery currents flowing modestly through some members of the revolutionary generation. In his will, written shortly before his death at the age of twenty-five in 1796, he sought to make restitution to an "unfortunate race of bondmen" over whom his ancestors had "usurped and exercised the most lawless and monstrous tyranny" and whom his fellow American countrymen had subjugated "in contradiction of their own declaration of rights" and "in violation of every sacred Law of nature." Although slaves had been "forced" upon him by his father, Randolph entreated his own children to have nothing to do with the "crime" of slavery. And to his slaves he declared that it was his "will and desire"—indeed, his "most anxious wish"—that they be "free and emancipated" upon his death.

Unlike his stepfather or his more famous cousin, Randolph did not despair of the impossibility of blacks and whites living together peaceably in a non-slave society. Rejecting his relatives' fantasy of colonization—the removal of free blacks from America—he bequeathed to his human property some four hundred acres to enable them to live independently and, presumably, prosperously. Randolph himself took no steps during his brief adulthood to liberate any slaves, even those not under mortgage. But his criticism of slavery was genuine, harsh, and uncompromising. "No abolitionist of the antebellum period would ever put the point more powerfully," Ely concludes.

Upon Randolph's untimely death, freedom for those he had "inhumanly, unjustly, & mercilessly" harmed did not come quickly. Like so many Virginia planters, his father incurred substantial debts to British creditors, for which slaves served as collateral, and those debts were inherited first by Richard and then by his wife Judith. It took more than a decade for Judith Randolph to execute her late husband's ardent wishes. After freeing a mere five slaves and reluctantly selling a small but unrecorded number of others, she finally managed to manumit roughly seventy slaves in the winter of 1810–1811, dividing among their families some 350 or so acres she owned along the Appomattox river just outside the small town of Farmville. Thus was born the community of Israel Hill.

In subsequent decades, partisan observers would do their best to advertise the failures of the Israel Hill settlers. In the aftermath of the Nat Turner rebellion in 1831, a nearby tobacco planter and manufacturer published in the pages of the influential *Farmers' Register* the first denunciation of Richard Randolph's experiment in manumission. A staunch defender of slavery, he condemned the community for its "idleness, poverty, and dissipation" and its people as a "great pest, and heavy tax" upon the county. Two decades later, as the crisis of the Union intensified, an unnamed journalist investigating conditions on Israel Hill concluded that the Israelites, having degenerated "from the day of their liberation," were a pathetic bunch—the men "drunkards, the women prostitutes, the children scrofulous and syphilitic," while most of them engaged in theft. Such first-hand exposés provided ample fodder for those who insisted that freedom did not suit backward races who were best served by bondage.

Rejecting these claims as little more than evidence of a pernicious myth of black degeneracy, historians have squeezed a rather different interpretation out of these hostile accounts. Free blacks "were not slaves," Ira Berlin famously remarked in 1974, but "neither were they free." Instead they were "balanced precariously between abject slavery ... and full freedom, which was denied them. Their world straddled one of hell's elusive boundaries." Two decades later, Brenda Stevenson applied Berlin's model to Loudon County, Virginia, finding the "[f]inancially unstable and socially marginalized" free blacks there resented by local whites, who subjected them to a "growing antagonism" and "increasingly harsh social and economic conditions" that threatened "every aspect of their lives." If white Southern propagandists sought to bolster slavery through an indictment of free black indolence and failure, the historians turned their words against them, using narratives of free black poverty and persecution to sharpen their indictment of slavery.

Ely makes the persuasive case that neither planter propagandists nor historians adequately captured the complexity of free black life as it existed on Israel Hill and presumably elsewhere in the South. Ideologues were just that: shills for the institution of slavery who, in actuality, knew better. The stock denunciation of Israel Hill's white neighbor was "demonstrably false in almost every particular," at variance with his own multifaceted interactions with the black Israelites, as they were called. As for the historians, their errors derive from reading too much into laws and proclamations and too little into lived experience. Ely's immersion in decades of county court records has enabled him to reconstruct the fabric of daily life in Prince Edward County. The resulting portrait is sophisticated, complex, and nuanced, providing a very different vision of life in the nineteenth-century South.

Ely is straightforward about the brutality and the inhumanity of the slave system and its impact on free African Americans. Slaveholders, regardless of their personal virtues, forcibly extracted labor from their human chattel, broke up families when it served their pecuniary interests to do so, and resorted to cruel punishment for challenges to their authority. For their part, free blacks wore the "badge of inferior citizenship," in that they could not vote, sit on juries, testify against whites, or serve in militias. The discrimination they suffered included the obligation to register with county authorities and produce legal

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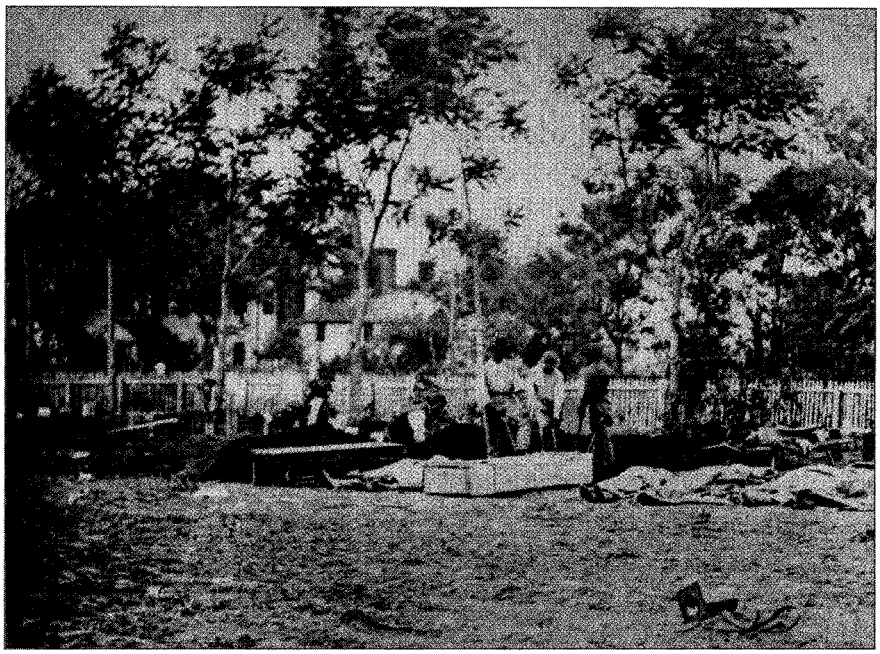
proof of freedom upon demand and the requirement to obtain special licenses to procure guns. In 1806, Virginia legislators even passed a law threatening to re-enslave any manumitted black who did not leave the state after one year. Innumerable injustices demonstrated that "slavery as a system was irredeemable," and that the small number of free blacks were unmistakably "second-class citizens."

Within those circumscribed limits, Ely finds a far more complicated picture of free black achievement and white flexibility than many historians would allow. Contradicting the charges of indolence and degeneracy was a solid record of economic striving and advancement. The work ethic took deep root on Israel Hill, and Richard Randolph's former slaves and their children carved out a largely secure place for themselves in the economy of southwestern Virginia. Most engaged in at least some farming, growing tobacco or corn. In selling their labor to local whites, who rarely hesitated to employ local free blacks whose skills they needed and appreciated, black Israelites avoided dependence on any one white family. Receiving wages equal to those paid to white workers, they plied their crafts as shoemakers, carpenters, ditch-diggers, millers, waggoners, batteaumen, spinners, laundresses, nurses, and midwives.

This rural world of work and commerce brought whites and blacks together on a constant basis. Regular interracial encounters could have generated racial friction, but apparently they did not. Integrated work crews in construction or in the riverboat trade were unexceptional. "That members of a biracial crew might lodge together, or that hired slaves could earn wages for overtime work, or that one group of workers would feel empathy toward another, struck no one as remarkable," Ely concludes. No one found it "unusual for men both black and white, well-off and humble, free and enslaved, to spend time at a free black man's house" or even to "eat or sleep there." More prosperous whites posted bond for less well-off free blacks or executed their wills, while the financially secure of both races might find themselves "rubbing shoulders at estate sales, public events, or places of business" as late as the 1850s. Indeed, much of the behavior of Prince Edward County whites seemed to fly in the face of the pro-slavery ideology that they formally espoused.

And much of the behavior that free blacks engaged in also challenged their subordinate place in the social order, and their subsequent depiction by historians as "slaves without masters." That their independence was what mattered most to the black Israelites is hardly surprising. What is surprising is that they turned, often successfully, to the county courts to defend that independence. Neither all-white juries nor the prohibition of black testimony against whites in criminal cases deterred the black Israelites from aggressively pursuing their legal grievances against whites—and other blacks. The courts "served as crucial venues for conducting and resolving conflict" in Prince Edward County as elsewhere in the United States, Ely observes; and like local whites, free blacks regularly sought legal redress for nonpayment of debts, assault, and slander. Whether in criminal or civil cases, the number of rulings favorable to free blacks leads Ely to conclude that white judges and jurors "often remembered the humanity" of those blacks before them, listened closely to black testimony (even when they weren't supposed to), and "tended to judge them as individuals whom they knew, not as appendages of that abstract, aggregate free black *category* against which legislators and editorialists aimed racist laws and rhetoric." Reputation seems to have mattered, as did the ostensible fairness of an otherwise unfair legal system designed to uphold the legal ownership of one human being by another.

THE TEXTURES OF DAILY LIFE in Prince Edward County lie at the evidentiary core of Ely's argument about the complexities of race and freedom. Repeatedly he returns to the simple point that the interpretation, the execution, or the lack of execution of anti–free black statutes tell us as much as, if not more than, does the actual letter of the law, however oppressive or discriminatory it appeared on paper. Similarly, attention to the quotidian interactions between whites and blacks is as important in assessing the quality of free blacks' lives as are the pro-slavery and anti-black proclamations emanating from the mouths and pens of politicians and newspaper editors.



COURTESY ALFRED A. KNOPF

Free African Americans in Virginia digging graves, circa 1860

The discrepancies between law and practice, between ideology and lived experience, are the most significant revelations of the Israel Hill story. Again and again, whites in the vicinity of Israel Hill behaved in a manner that makes little sense if only laws and formal ideology are considered. In the aftermath of the Nat Turner slave uprising, for instance, unprepared and poorly armed white Prince Edward's officials responded with no sense of urgency to the theoretical possibility of rebellion closer to

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home. Ely found "no sudden action," official or otherwise, against free blacks. A month later, county officials, acting in a "perfectly banal fashion," issued an order requiring the disarming of local free blacks. Constables responsible for collecting the arms "moved languidly and without much apparent conviction," and in one case may not even have carried out the order. The number of local slave patrollers increased only temporarily; soon "day-by-day race relations had largely returned to normal." And the black Israelites resumed their possession of guns. Even as sectional tensions and anti–free black rhetoric intensified in the 1850s, black Israelites continued to do well economically, achieving "relative prosperity, progress, and even, in some cases, the fulfillment of dreams."

Ely convincingly uncovers what he calls a pervasive "live-and-let-live" attitude, which led whites to value "individual character above racial solidarity" and deal "matter-of-factly" and even "civilly" and "amicably" with their free black neighbors. This is no small achievement. He can only speculate, though, as to why this was the case. At times he suggests that a shared belief in hard work, the entrepreneurial spirit, and Christian morality prompted whites to judge the blacks they dealt with as individuals and not as stand-ins for the abstract category of free black. Ultimately, the explanation that he posits goes beyond the evidence at hand: that many Prince Edward County whites "felt secure enough to deal fairly and even respectfully with free African Americans partly because slavery still held most blacks firmly in its grip"; confident in their dominance over the county's black majority, they could afford a degree of flexibility that enabled them to treat free blacks as people. The extensive surviving court records in which Ely immersed himself allows him to identify with conviction the "live-and-let-live" character of daily interactions, but sources providing insight into whites' psychological motivations remain in short supply. Aside from Richard Randolph, whose expansive and impassioned will affords us privileged access to his emotions and ideology, no other white person in Prince Edward County was considerate enough of posterity to follow suit.

ELY RECOGNIZES THAT HIS RE-casting of the history of free African Americans runs not only against the historiographical grain but against contemporary political sensibilities as well. In a "case of tragically delayed maturation," he notes, Americans have finally acknowledged the long history of crimes committed against people of African descent. They "love to condemn the injustices of earlier eras because it makes them feel righteous in their insulated present," which they perceive as vastly better that a past marked by slavery and Jim Crow. But the story of free black accomplishment against all odds contributes little to the vindication of white America today. Perhaps that formulation captures a public disposition, but it misses the internal dynamics of the academy. Indeed, Ely's general claim that "almost no one today wants to risk soft-pedaling the racial oppression that has blighted American history" applies more to the historical profession than it does to the general population. The complexity that Ely recounts in his narrative of free black success and Southern white flexibility is not easy to swallow for a stratum of committed scholars who appear to be still arguing, countless books and infinite numbers of articles later, that slaves and free African Americans never accepted the legitimacy of their bondage. That historiographical battle was happily won years ago.

The irrepressible need for a useable past, or at least one that fits neatly into a clear morality-tale framework, also puts *Israel on the Appomattox* somewhat at odds with the political orientation of many in the professoriat. The men and women whose experiences Ely eloquently chronicles were not cut in the mold of black abolitionists such as David Walker and Harriet Tubman or of slave rebels such as Nat Turner. They lived quieter, more bounded lives that pressed more subtly at the limitations imposed upon them by white society. "Israel on the Appomattox, after all, was a community, not a utopian commune," Ely explains. "Like their white neighbors, Israelites sought to make money, and they paid serious attention to IOUs, property lines, individual prerogatives, and businesslike arrangements."

True, they utilized the courts not only to recover money owed them or dispute slanderous charges, but also to challenge false arrests; they exhibited a "drive to work and accumulate wealth," but did so also as part of a broader "quest for self-determination and dignity." In sum, they operated under—and pressed up against—a set of chafing constraints imposed upon them but "did not allow others to define their identity for them." To his credit, however, Ely unfashionably resists many of the temptations to which historians of the subaltern fall prey: to translate all black self-activity into activism; to elevate the understandable pursuit of familial security, economic advancement, and personal dignity into full-fledged political agency; and to locate overt or covert anti-slavery or anti-racist politics in his subjects' quest for independence and autonomy. Reluctant to impress the black Israelites into political service as recognizable front-line soldiers in the long black struggle for freedom, he instead appreciates them on their own terms. His book is a meticulous reconstruction of a community striving for quiet dignity in slavery's shadow. It may not directly address any contemporary political or social needs, but it does offer a better model of historical exploration that is deeply respectful of its subjects' humanity. ■

Calavera for a Friend

Día de los Muertos

When your heart is scorched out, the unruly world
Will seal around you as a dark ocean
Behind a ship at dusk—the wake will fade
And spread wider, until fully unfurled.
Love reserved for you will slacken. Your portion
Of commerce ends with the last deal you made.
A stranger will take your job, buy your home,
Maybe wear your shirts and shoes, and the books
You cherished will be thumbed by new readers.
Young tourists will roam everywhere you roamed.
Some small items might remain, artifacts,
Footnotes, fingerprints, cuff links, little anchors,
Small burrs that cling: initials carved in a tree,
Your name inscribed where no one will see.

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Village People

SHE'S NOT SURE WHETHER SHE is running for president. But she is certain that the time is right for a woman to try. Maybe Hillary Clinton thinks that Nancy Pelosi should be the Democratic candidate. OK, Hillary is not a candid person. This time—actually, the day that I write—she was not candid on NPR's "Morning Edition." Yesterday, it was on another platform. Tomorrow, she won't be candid on still another one. So, what else is new? We've accommodated to her trying to figure all the angles. Hillary has been scheming for the presidency since the day her husband entered the White House, which is why she didn't much take to Al Gore. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if she conspired with James Baker—or is that just me?

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS ABOUT FIGURING all the angles is that you can't. And, believe me, Hillary tried. She has had an apparatus in place for just that chore for years. Not long enough ago to include Harold Ickes's father, the other Harold Ickes, who schemed for FDR. But this Harold Ickes (who ran Eugene McCarthy's campaign in New York), and Mandy Grunwald and John Podesta and Mark Penn and Tony Podesta and Susan Thomases, unless any of these have been unceremoniously pushed off the ship, much like Marian Wright Edelman—Hillary's closest sister and ideological soulmate—was pushed, never to be let on board again. In its youth, the team was a band of idealists, self-styled. Now it's made up of hardened cynics, no pretense otherwise. But the same folk.

HILLARY AND CO. PREPARED FOR MARK Warner and John Edwards, Bill Richardson and Joe Biden, Tom Vilsack and the really impossible—no, deluded—dreamer John Kerry. She probably had a strategy against Gore, too. She was confident and contemptuous. And then, suddenly, she found herself running against a latter-day Martin Luther King Jr.

THERE WAS NO WAY TO SEE BARACK Obama coming. And, damn it, he is a picture of America's future, black and white. African father. Columbia. Harvard Law School, where he was president of the *Law Review*, no slouch he. Taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago, greater evidence of his brilliance. Supple in mind and bearing, evoking energy and thoughtfulness. Ah, yes, his most important public quality: He is comfortable in his own skin. She is not. Oh, is she not! What could Hillary possibly say against him? In the Democratic Party, it is still difficult to honestly criticize an African American. You can't even say a bad word about Al Sharpton, even though you can't say a truthful good word about him, either. But what, for heaven's sake, is there to criticize about Obama? Nothing.

HILLARY IS HOLDING SÉANCES WITH Democratic politicians in New York. They can't but be for her. Even though my old student Chuck Schumer is more popular than her and more respected. And certainly deeper. The same is true for Eliot Spitzer. If they actually endorse, their endorsements will be discounted. New Mexico Representative Tom Udall probably supports New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. And that means exactly what? Nothing. On the other hand, maybe Hillary will be able to entice Eleanor Roosevelt into her corner.

I HAVE A QUESTION I'VE BEEN RELUCtant to ask. Do the Clintons have any friends who aren't really rich? Maybe just a few, for old time's sake. But, as I read the clips about them, they consort largely, and maybe only, with zillionaires and very high-pay Hollywood types. It is not an axiomatic vocational hazard of politicians. Let me take Gore as an instance. He and Tipper have musician friends and professor friends and artist friends and just plain worker friends and farmer friends, for sure. Not that they don't mix with computer magnates, as well. But the Gores are rooted in ordinary life—in real, even quotidian activity. For example, he actually writes his own books. Believe it or not, it's true. The indulgent wealth that surrounds Bill and Hillary is, I am sure, corrupting. And that corruption—of taste, of moderation, of what is essential—cripples the soul and distorts life itself.

NO WONDER THAT BILL CLINTON FLIES with frequency to Dubai and other sand eruptions in the Gulf to speak at conference after conference on topics so orotund that no one reports what he says. But isn't it a degradation of the presidency for this former president to shmooze, for money and money alone, with men (yes, only men) who want from him only his presence? But perhaps this sexism is a relief. The robed hosts do allow women to be among their foreign guests. At least they allow Madame Albright, who flatters them, also to address them. And Wesley Clark. But Clinton is the king of the Emirates Airline route. The indisputable king.

WHICH BRINGS ME BACK TO HILLARY. Does the American public really want her husband in the White House once again? And with nothing to do? Right now, what with George W. and Laura ensconced in the upstairs rooms, the return of the previous first couple may seem attractive, even alluring. But the hardened woman, who lost her health care proposal not to a GOP Congress but to a Democratic one, does not evoke the capacity to persuade, to compromise, to administer, to govern. Her coterie is too tight. Her mind too rigid. And her husband's is too, well, loose.

HILLARY STARTED OUT IN 1993 WITH "the politics of meaning," that pretentious and portentous phrase that actually means nothing. She had leapt at it out of the mouth of a foolish "rabbi," Michael Lerner, earnest and oleaginous (he the enthusiast of *tikkun olam*, a theology rooted nowhere so firmly as in a Peter, Paul, and Mary song). But she dropped it quickly when she discovered that the American people were on to her preacher-teacher's banal words. Then she peddled *It Takes A Village* as book and slogan. It soon appeared too soft for her own entry into politics, and so she also sidetracked this theme. But now she is running for president. Tough-minded she was on Iraq, right up there with that junior senator from Massachusetts. A few days ago, she said that, had she known what she knows now, she wouldn't have voted for the war. Then, today, she said she wished she had voted against the war, whatever. She has fumbled and disenchanted the left, and the left is not easily forgiving. Still, as a gesture to that flank of the party, Hillary has republished *It Takes A Village*. But what it really takes is a majority of the electoral college. Which I don't see.

MARTIN PERETZ

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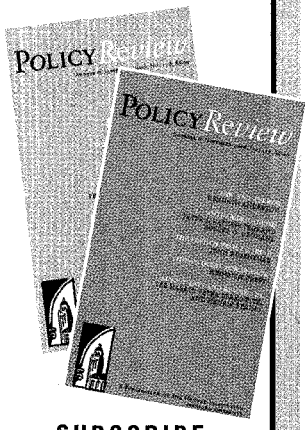

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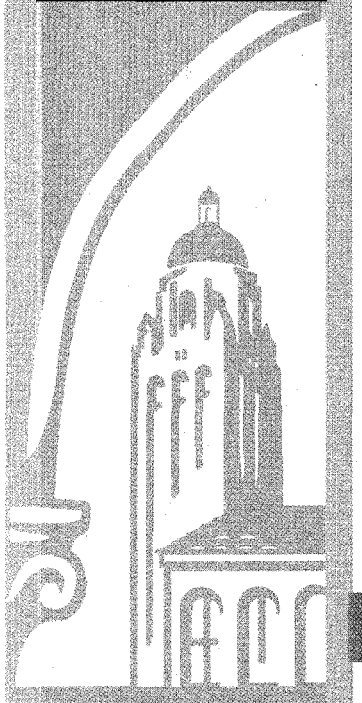

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In the new issue of *Policy Review*

Iraq: Last Chance

A political settlement before any withdrawal

To concede that going to war in Iraq was a grave mistake of policy is not to embrace the conclusion that an immediate pullout — or one by a declared date moderated by conditions on the ground — would today serve U.S. interests. The country may have entered the war with erroneous notions of the state of Saddam's WMD programs. It may have underestimated the resilience of former Baathists and regime loyalists, their access to weapons, and the help they would get from foreign jihadists. It may have failed to anticipate that a society divided and oppressed by an authoritarian ruler might erupt into ethnic and religious conflict when that leader departs. It may have been naive in thinking that an externally modeled Iraqi democratic government would opt for secular rather than sectarian parliamentary representation and that its near-perfect transition would transform the region into a galaxy of democratic states. And it may have underestimated the number of troops needed to occupy a country of 25 million. Yet the answer is not to compound those mistakes by leaving in a way that makes large-scale civil war nearly inevitable, pushes the country into the lap of its Iranian neighbor, or advertises the United States as an unreliable friend, a hesitant hegemon, and a rewarder of those terrorists with the tenacity to outlast the behemoth. No, when a great power puts its leg in a snare, there must be some cure other than amputation.

—Robert Zelnick

The Scapegoats among Us

Blame-shifting after 9/11

To judge by current intellectual trends, many post-9/11 attempts to diagnose the American soul, both here and in Europe, have served less to clarify reality than to gravitate toward safer and more palatable substitutes. It is a fraught, fascinating spectacle worth exploring in detail — the more so because a parallel outpouring of books, especially from the contemporary European front, makes very clear what today's obvious displacements of political passion are really about.

—Mary Eberstadt

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